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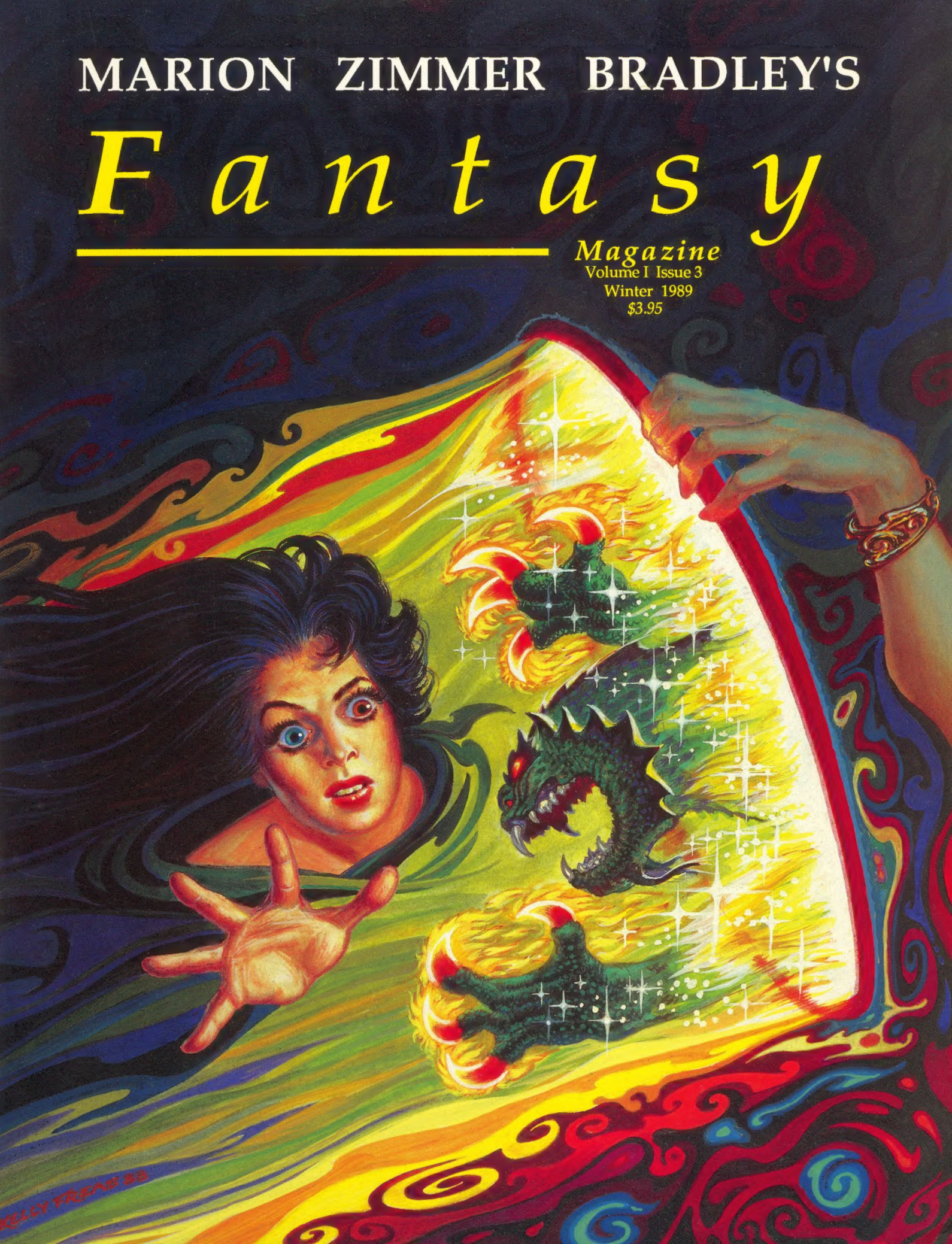

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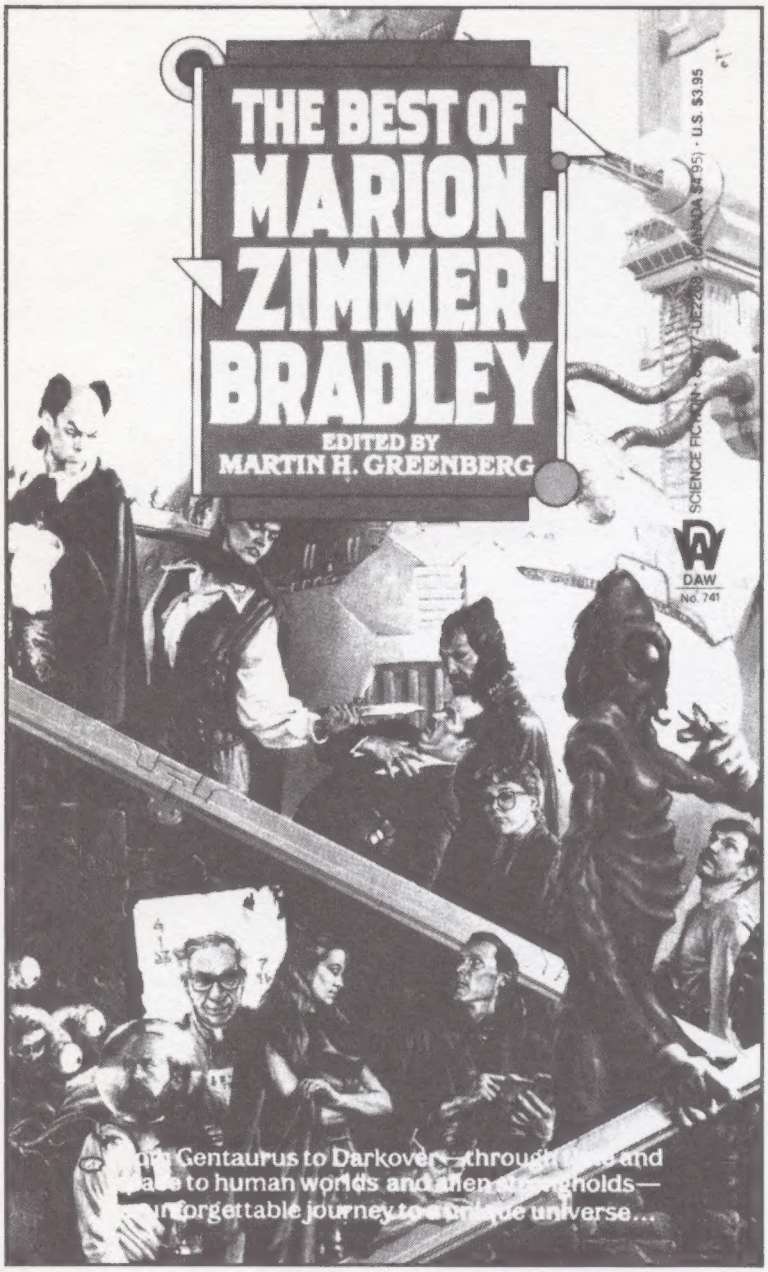

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Fantasy Magazine

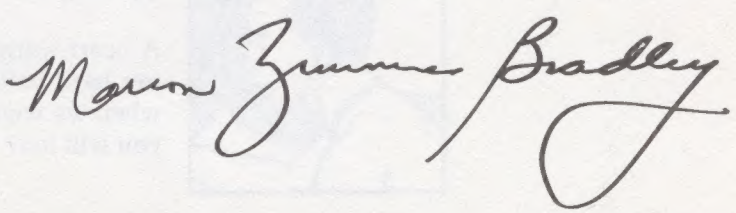
EDITORIAL

There's one question that every writer gets asked. I guess I can't complain, because I was reading a book of essays last year by one Myrtle Reid, whose books—*The Master's Violin, Lavender and Old Lace*—I loved when I was ten years old. She was very popular in 1890, and in one of her essays, she said that whenever she travelled to promote her romantic tales, she was always sure to be asked one question: she might be asked about how she felt about women's rights, motoring veils, the future of the horseless carriage, what she fed her children for breakfast when she was working, or the theory of co-education; but one question she was sure to be asked; *Where do you get your ideas?*

I still get asked that, and feel the ghost of Ms. Reid over my shoulder. The questions about motoring veils have gone the way of the motoring veils themselves (thank heavens), and I no longer need to debate co-education; but readers still ask me, every time I speak to a school, college, on the radio, or on TV; and everyone I meet who writes, either for a living or amusement, gets that same question: *where do you get your ideas?*

Some of us have funny or flip answers to it. One writer, for instance, says he always answers *Utica*. He says, "It doesn't mean anything, but it shuts them up." There is also a tale some writers tell, with all the appearance of seriousness; that when one becomes a dues-paying member of a professional organization such as the Author's Guild, or the Mystery Writers of America, one is allowed to subscribe to a magazine called IDEAS, which will send you many ideas per month. Some people even believe this. There seems no limit to human credulity. As for me, I have two answers: sometimes I answer "I keep a little old lady chained up in the basement to think them up for me"—which is as good an answer about the subconscious as I can think of, but more recently I have taken to saying; "Oh, I just leave a saucer of milk on the back porch."

These answers are all pretty silly, I suppose; but what *can* you say? If the person asking me seems serious, and I suspect he—or more likely, she—is actually trying to get some insight into the creative process, I have another answer; which is: "that's the difference between a writer and a non-writer; a writer is a person who has ideas, and a non-writer isn't." (I often wonder at the kind of person who needs to ask; what do they have in their heads instead of ideas? Marshmallows? Feathers?) I can no more imagine how anyone lives through a day without ideas than I can imagine going without food or water; ideas to them being something strange? I—and most writers I know—could get enough ideas between now and dinnertime for a lifetime's writing; what we need is not ideas, but time, energy, and somebody to look after the baby while we translate these ideas into stories.



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Cover Story— **A Glassmaker's Courage** *page 4*

by M. Coleman Easton and Phyllis Ann Karr

Two popular writers bring the heroes and heroines of their own series together for the first time. I've always loved the 'joined worlds' stories where fabulous worlds and characters unite.

A Flower from the Dust of Khedderide *page 14*

by Pat Cirone

A new look at gender roles in an alien society. Reading it, I found a chance -- in fact, a need -- to take a long hard look at our own society and its basic assumptions-- what is the first thing we want to know about a new baby? And what happens in a society without those arbitrary assumptions?

The Djinn Bottle *page 24*

by Deborah Millitello

One of the oldest stories of fantasy is the story of the bottled imp; but there are a dozen ways for the djinn to trick his way out of it-- or does he? This story isn't what you'd expect.

The Adinkra Cloth *page 32*

by Mary C. Aldridge

A heart-warming and sentimental African story-- my hard-boiled publisher and I both got tearful when we were proof-reading /editing, etc. Maybe you will too? Have a hanky handy.

Dream Journey *page 40*

by Janet Fox

What happens during sleep? Is it just illusion--or is it real? Strange adventures -- and strange companions – in a strange place.

Counterexample *page 59*

by L.A. Taylor

Suppose you were faced with the problem of telling your daughters that they could never have normal children. How do you think your children would react? Diary entries of a mother telling an extra-ordinary story.

FEATURED STORY

FALLING APART **51**
by Larry Hodges
This story is indescribable--anything I said would have the words, but not the music. We all laughed until we thought our heads would fall off. Read it and see if you agree.

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Your chance to Vote for your favorite story and author in this issue.

Glassmaker's Courage

by M. Coleman Easton and Phyllis Ann Karr

Frostflower saw that she had failed again to find the way back to the Tanglelands. Moments before, the Circle had shown what seemed an ideal destination: a retreat of her homeworld's sorceri. Now, as she, Thorn, and Dowl stepped through the portal, the scene altered. The surrounding mountains remained, but the retreat turned into a few straggling rows of squat, dark houses. Some, she noted, were built perilously close to the cliff's edge. Sorceri knew better than that!

"Well," said Thorn, "at least we should be able to get a meal, a bed and a quiet place where you can study what went wrong this time. If we're lucky, maybe even a bath."

The sorceress sighed, wondering how long it would take to unravel Dathru's mischief. He had brought them somehow into his own world, and Frostflower had been trying ever since to bring them home again, with an unfamiliar magic as her only means. Now they were in another wrong place, and she must study Dathru's book once more. Putting away the Circle, shrunken to a hand's breadth after their passage, she followed her warrior friend out from beneath the trees.

A half-grown child sitting on a boulder at the near edge of the village stood up, gave a shout and pointed one arm in their direction. The other people in sight—a smith and two customers at an outdoor forge, someone filling a pitcher at a brook, two slim figures atop another boulder at the village's far end—turned from their activities to stare at the newcomers.

Frostflower felt a brief shiver. "Perhaps they can tell that we have come from another world."

"Hellbog, how?"

"We travelers wear a thin aura, shimmering between light and dark. Dathru's book gives an exercise for learning to see it. The method is so simple that it may be a common practice in some worlds."

"Bloodrastor's eardrums!" Thorn commented, using another thoughtfully mild new expletive. "They're just cautious of strangers, any strangers."

The distance made the villagers' expressions unreadable, but their clothing appeared compatible with Frostflower's black robe and Thorn's cloak, tunic and trousers. When Dowl, standing between the two women, wagged his tail and barked, to be answered by more than one dog inside the houses, the youth on the near boulder sat down again. One of the smith's customers entered a large building near the brook. The other people returned to their former activities, though with frequent glances up. The barking gradually echoed away.

The women walked down at an easy pace, the dog sometime padding alongside and sometimes a little ahead, his tail swinging constantly. The midday sun was warm. Thorn threw her cloak well back on her shoulders, while Frostflower shook off her hood and allowed the breezes to play with her long hair.

Before they had covered half the distance to the watchlad's boulder, fifteen or twenty people had come out of the large building to stand where mountain trail widened into village street. They gazed at the intruders, sending up a hushed murmur. Still more onlookers were joining them from the other houses.

"I'm not sure I like this," Thorn observed. "We could try going back through the Circle right now, and hope for someplace friendlier."

"And stumble, perhaps, into someplace worse?" They had already passed through worlds more obviously perilous. "The buzz sounds far from angry. They may run from us, but I doubt they will attack us in a mob, or even throw stones. To me, this seems less hostile than the greeting most farmers' folk give sorceri in our own middle Tanglelands."

"All right, I know," the swordswoman grumbled. "And I'd rather go on a raid blindfolded than stroll into a Tanglelands town blackrobed."

"Courage has different uses, Thorn. I would never join you on a raid at all. Though it does feel... curious," the sorceress conceded, "to meet such stares among mountains." The heights, after all, provided refuge for her kind at home. "But it may be your sword that worries these folk," she added with a

touch of teasing, "and not my robe."

The travelers approached the watchlad. "Hey, youngster!" Thorn called out, elaborately jovial. "What town is this, and where can we buy the best meal?" The words were in her own tongue, but by Dathru's language sorcery she knew she'd be understood.

"Bekenhat, we call it," he answered. "And where might you two hail from?"

"Last village back that way," the swordswoman lied deftly, with a vague gesture up the trail.

The youth narrowed his eyes, and for a moment the sorceress wondered if there even was a village behind her. "Did they have any news of... " he began, but his glance caught on Frostflower's unhooded face. His gray eyes grew round in one brief, horrified stare. Then he leapt off his boulder and pelted toward the crowd, bawling, "The demon! It's come! It's come!" Immediately, villagers started scurrying back into their houses."

"Demon?" said Thorn, with a quizzical glance at her friend.

Frostflower sighed. "Probably my eyes again. Remember how you jumped, hardened warrior that you are, the first time you saw them."

"Blinked, maybe. I never jumped. And I certainly never mistook you for a boggy demon!"

"I've heard that one Tanglelands demon—Feshgak—has blue hair and a blood-red beard. The folk of this world may believe in a demon with one blue and one brown eye."

"You've learned more about our farmer-priests' demons than I ever knew. Askor and Smardon—those two are enough for my nightmares. Anyway, it wasn't my old sword Slicer that scared those people down there. Well, what now?"

The last of the villagers had vanished indoors, leaving a broken pitcher by the stream, and a smoking forge. Dowl whined plaintively at the deserted street.

Frostflower gazed around. The mountain broadleafs spread golden clouds against the green pines, blue sky, and gray-brown rock faces. Far below the village, just visible beyond the cliff's edge, stretched a lake that reminded her of Skycatch Water near her own Windslope Retreat. Mountain-nurtured, she found the place good in spite of its inhabitants' poor welcome. "Perhaps we should try that place back up the trail?" she suggested. "You might get food there, while I stay out of sight and study Dathru's book."

"Too bad we don't know how far it is. Sure you don't want to try—Hey, look there! One brave local."

Someone had emerged from a house that stood apart at the far end of the village. Someone who was actually hurrying forward as if to greet them—a tall person, lanky yet broad-shouldered, trousered, aproned and bearded.

"Is that a lantern he's carrying?" asked Thorn. "Why in the middle of the day?"

"Some ceremony, perhaps. Of welcome, I hope."

"Unh. Or to ward off demons. Maybe that's his job."

Dowl barked again and bounded forward, then hesitated and turned from side to side with little whines of inquiry.

"Hush, Dowl. It will be a friend, surely." Stroking the dog's head in passing, the sorceress started toward the villager.

He paused, then resumed his forward stride. His left hand held the lantern; from his right, she saw, dangled a string of glossy beads.

"Reverence..." Frostflower began respectfully, for despite his

craftworker's clothing, he wore authority like an almost palpable overcloak. The language sorcery, she trusted, would translate her word to an equivalent title.

For a moment she thought he was replying. But his lips remained compressed, though he was near enough for her to see the grizzled streaks in his black beard. Her eyes returned, fascinated, to the beads he held—translucent, gemlike orbs aglow with their own inner fires. They were of differing hues, from ambered gold to deepest burnt-umber, each a variant of brown. So many splendid browns!

Now he spoke to her: "Go to your left! At once! Turn!" Those words echoed in her skull, but superimposed on them was another exhortation, "Ormek! Ormek help me!"

Watching his lips, she could not determine which words he had spoken aloud. But she heard Thorn repeat, "Ormek?" and that told her what the man's mouth was saying. Yet his other voice, the one giving her orders, grew even louder.

Unuttered by his lips, uncaught by her ears, the words must be flying from his mind directly into hers. This was powerful sorcery! Reassured, for here was a fellow sorceron, she hurried toward him.

"That way! To your left!" the voice insisted, as his outstretched hand shook the beads slightly, no more than a caressing breeze might stir them. She thought that she ignored his instruction, knowing well it could serve no purpose. She believed that she was walking straight to him, repeating phrases of friendship, until she heard Thorn's shout: "Frost! Watch where the hellbog you're going!"

The sorceress became aware that, in studying the man's face—or beads?—she had turned her head. Looking about with some effort, she saw that she had indeed been bearing left, toward the cliff's edge. Dowl, taking a similar path, had almost reached the brink and stood pivoting round and round, whining in perplexity.

"To your left, demon! Nimoro, turn!"

She followed his order—less, she reasoned, in obedience than in fear for Dowl. Behind her, Thorn was shouting, but she hardly understood her friend's words. She reached Dowl, tried to pull him back to safe footing, and when he half resisted, she positioned herself between him and the edge.

"Jump!" cried the voice in her head.

And she found there was nothing in any world she would rather do than obey. Not for fear, not for love, not for unreasoning submission—but for some emotion she could not isolate, for it seemed compounded of all emotions.

"Away, Nimoro! Demon, turn."

She gazed over the cliff. Longingly. To fall, to plunge down into that lake so much like Skycatch Water... and to be at peace. Forever? It would be death!

Time seemed suspended as she balanced there, her reason suppressing her emotion as her arms held Dowl from leaping as she so ached to leap. Why? Why should this man wish her death so intently? And why should every emotion surge to obey a stranger?

"Jump!" This time fierce pain came with the command, a sudden burning that started at her left eye and spread relentlessly. The dog howled and writhed as if he too felt it. Gasping against her own spasms, the sorceress held him fast.

"It's you!" she heard Thorn shout. "Damn you to hellbog, you're doing it to her!"

Frostflower wrenched her gaze back to the street. Her friend had drawn sword and dagger to rush at the bearded man. Holding beads against lantern, he seemed to ignore his danger, and the sorceress could only crouch in helpless horror.

At the last moment, he flinched and dodged away from Thorn's attack. His arms separated, dragging those glossy orbs away from the heat, and his concentration seemed to waver. Respited from pain and partially from bewilderment, Frostflower thrust Dowl to safety and sprang toward her friend.

The voice began again at once. But—thank God!—she was near enough to catch Thorn's sword-handle before losing control of her movements. "Thorn, no!" she cried, pulling back on the weapon with all her strength, her palm slipping slightly on the sheen-amber. "This is—must be—some mistake!"

"Damn it, Frost, let me at the motherpricker before..."

The burning again. Frostflower spun, saw him touching beads to hot metal even as he stepped backward. But this time—only pain, no desire to obey him. She snatched, caught his right wrist.

He gave one terrified cry. Then, staring from her face to his own wrist, still tight in her grasp, he slowly relaxed. "You're not Nimoro," he whispered. "Can't be. I'd be crisped by now."

* * *

Apparently there was at least one sorceron in these mountains, though he called himself a Vigen, a maker of glass beads. Thorn was surprised that her friend accepted Halik's apologies so readily. The warrior was less charitable, informing him that he was lucky she had gone for him with sword instead of spear.

While Frostflower accompanied the glassmaker into his shop, Thorn scanned the empty street. The villagers were still hiding. Cautious buggers. Dowl crept to the Vigen's open doorway and peered in, his tail wagging. Stepping around him, Thorn followed the others inside.

"Your friend is handy with weapons," Halik was saying. "But against some dangers, a blade is useless. With my talismans, I've kept this village safe for a good ten years."

"Talismans," Frostflower repeated, sounding pleased. "A new form of sorcery. Even in Dathru's book, I have found no mention of such spells as yours."

Halik frowned. "I don't know what you mean by spells. The power of colored glass comes from our god Ormek's favor. I have nothing to do with dark spirits."

"Nor have we of the Tanglelands, believe me! But tell me of Ormek."

Apparently the language sorcery had trouble rendering "spells" for Halik. Well, let him chew on it the way they had to chew on his word "talismans." But Thorn was only half listening as she studied the Vigen's high workbench, well suited to a man of his stature. Small containers of bubbly glass stood in rows, and she caught hints of color through their translucent walls. Tools like Dathru's Circle, and even books, were absent.

"Ormek is the Lifegiver," explained Halik. "The Sun. Are you from so distant a land that your sky is cold and black?"

Frostflower answered quickly. "We too know the sun and all its gifts. To the farmer-priests of our land it is the home of Maesaru and Jendra, two deities who constantly couple to produce its life-giving warmth. We sorceri regard it simply as another of our One God's creations. Perhaps we have come to accept it with too much complacence..."

"Ah, but at least you recognize His power." Halik turned to the workbench. "And now I would like to show you something of my art. It's not often that I meet one who can appreciate its subtleties." He picked up a vial and poured out a few glossy grains onto a wooden paddle, then moved the paddle into the light coming through a translucent windowpane. When the illumination struck the fragments, Frostflower sucked in her breath. Even from where she stood, Thorn could see why. Each grain was like a tiny jewel, reflecting golden brilliance.

"Look at this hue," the Vigen went on. "I spent half a year learning how to make it. And a talisman might require a dozen such colorings."

"Yes, and what exactly can you do with your glass charms?" Thorn demanded. "Aside from trying to make innocent travelers into vulture's meat."

"My beads are used only for protection," Halik insisted. "And there is, by many accounts, a demon abroad. That's why we mistook your friend." He lifted a strand of talismans, each of a yellow hue. "If one of these should match the eye color of a creature, then I can control its will. But without a close match, the bead is powerless. Now you may search my shop and you'll see no colorings of green or blue or gray. I would never break my oath to Ormek and use glass against a person."

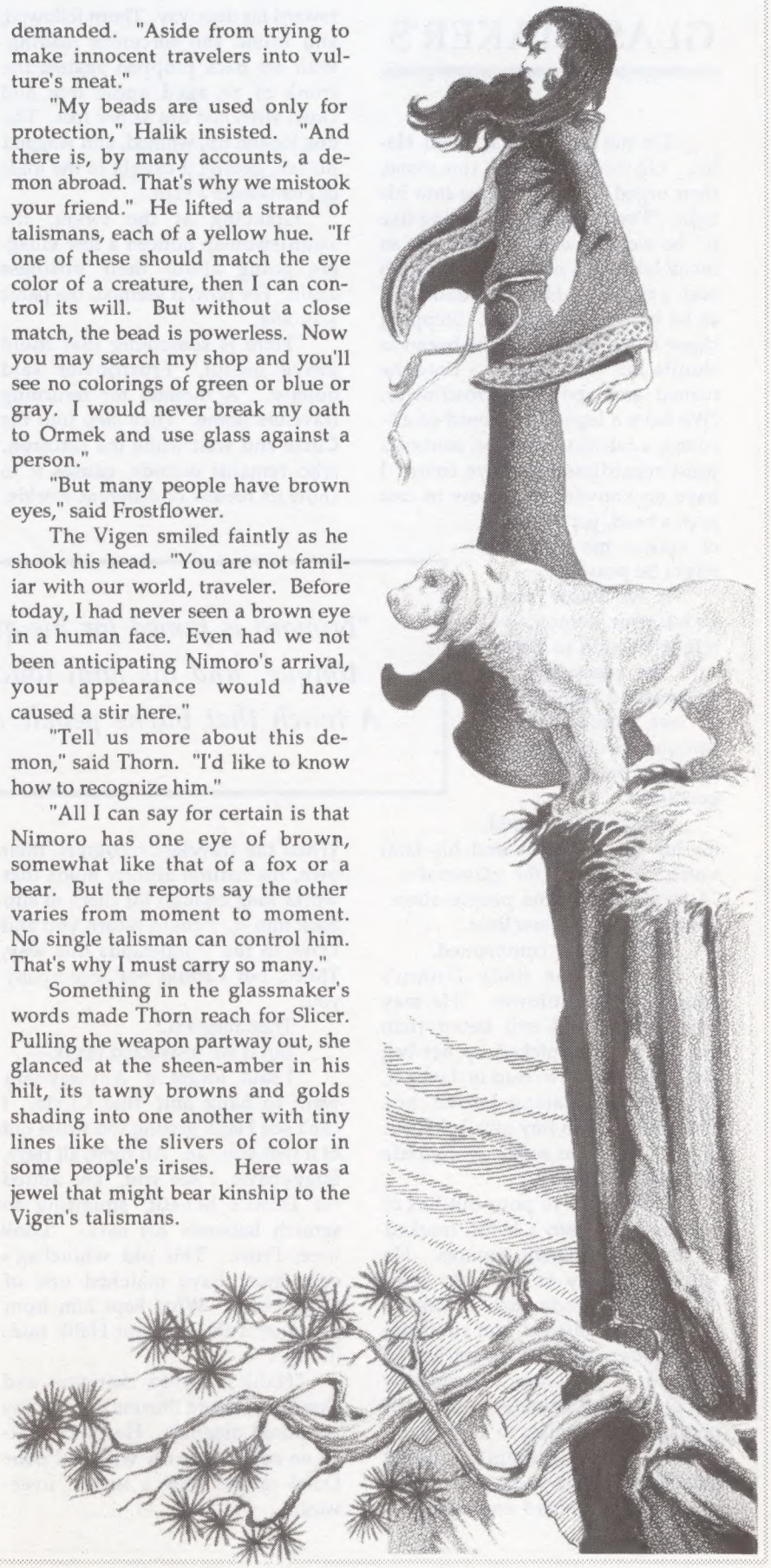
"But many people have brown eyes," said Frostflower.

The Vigen smiled faintly as he shook his head. "You are not familiar with our world, traveler. Before today, I had never seen a brown eye in a human face. Even had we not been anticipating Nimoro's arrival, your appearance would have caused a stir here."

"Tell us more about this demon," said Thorn. "I'd like to know how to recognize him."

"All I can say for certain is that Nimoro has one eye of brown, somewhat like that of a fox or a bear. But the reports say the other varies from moment to moment. No single talisman can control him. That's why I must carry so many."

Something in the glassmaker's words made Thorn reach for Slicer. Pulling the weapon partway out, she glanced at the sheen-amber in his hilt, its tawny browns and golds shading into one another with tiny lines like the slivers of color in some people's irises. Here was a jewel that might bear kinship to the Vigen's talismans.



GLASSMAKER'S

"Let me look at that," said Halik. He bent to study the stone, then urged Thorn to move into his light. "I've never seen anything like it," he went on eagerly. "It's got so many hues. If I had a talisman with such a range..." His voice trailed off as he became thoughtful. Stepping closer to his workbench, he began to shuffle his vials. After a time, he turned and spoke to Frostflower. "We have a legend of a bead-of-all-colors, a talisman that can control a beast regardless of its eye color. I have no knowledge of how to cast such a bead, yet this jewel makes me think it might be possible."

"If we know more about your demon, we might be able to help," said the sorceress. "I understand something of our farmer-priests' demons, though I always believed them mere superstition."

"Nimoro is famed for his quick tongue and his fatal touch," answered the glassmaker. "A touch that burns people alive. Beyond that, we know little."

"Unh," Thorn commented.

"Well, let me study Dathru's book," said Frostflower. "He may have understood evil better than any of us." She picked up her bag and went outside to read in daylight, Dowl padding along behind her. Thorn decided to stay awhile longer. She wasn't quite ready to concede the Vigen their trust.

Halik began to pour out bits of colored glass onto a board marked off into many small squares. He worked quickly at first, but soon took time to study each additional vial. Thorn watched him rummaging through old caskets stacked in the rear of the shop, occasionally bringing small containers made of pottery or dusty glass to his bench.

The Vigen evidently needed good light for his work. He picked up the mixing board and carried it toward his doorway. Thorn followed, and found the sorceress reading-with her back propped against the trunk of an aged apple tree and Dowl stretched out at her feet. The dog looked up, whined, and wagged his tail, getting it caught in the folds of Frostflower's skirt.

Glancing at the street, the swordswoman noticed a few villagers going about their business again. For now, it seemed, the panic was over.

"Here is something that could prove useful," Frostflower said quietly. "A method for returning travelers home. They step into the Circle and wait while the sorceron, who remains outside, causes it to show its review of different worlds.

"Nimoro is famed for his quick tongue and his fatal touch... A touch that burns people alive."

When the travelers recognize their own, the natural affinity holds that world long enough for them to slip back into it. I could return you and Dowl to the Tanglelands this way, Thorn, but I could not accompany you."

"Then forget it."

"But if we instructed Halik—"

"I said, forget it! Anyway you want to hang onto that Circle. I can't see Halik getting the value out of it that you can. All right, all right, Boggypaws, I see you," she added for Dowl's benefit, squatting to scratch between his ears. "Look here, Frost. This old whinebag's eyes must have matched one of those beads. What kept him from going over the moment Halik said, 'Jump'?"

"Halik believed that you and Dowl were mere illusion, part of my supposed disguise. He concentrated on controlling my will, and poor Dowl caught only a sort of overwash."

"Mmm. Well, I still don't quite understand how you fought off Halik's spell. Unless when you grabbed Slicer's sheen-amber..."

"As soon as I touched it, the wish to obey him was gone. Now, some of its streaks surely match the brown of my left eye, and I suppose that protected me from the power of his talismans." Frostflower winked. "And then, from the outset, he could only half control me, since he had no bead to match my blue eye. We are all fortunate that both your eyes are green."

"Unh. Is the sorcery in the color or the casting?"

"I should guess that it requires both, here in Halik's world. Some extra gloss of power seems to adhere to us and our things, your sheen-amber for instance, simply because we are otherworldly." Frostflower sighed. "If only I could discover some pattern, some way to learn exactly how it changes from world to world..."

"Should be easy for someone who reasoned, in the press of the fight: 'They're all scared breathless of us, so this is really a good man trying to murder me by mistake'—you sure you figured all that out before you tried to stop me? It wasn't that you just couldn't stand the idea of seeing anybody's blood?"

"He seemed to exercise a very firm control on all my emotions, Thorn, but my reason was still my own."

"Unh. Frost, your people should never have let you go wandering anywhere without a good, suspicious bodyguard." The warrior turned to watch Halik, who was bending over a table that stood beside his door. using a tiny pair of tongs, he moved grains of glass from the board and placed them in a small clay mold. The process went on so long that Thorn turned back toward the apple tree.

"Suppose Nimoro is like us, a traveler among these worlds,"

mused the sorceress. "Lost, confused..."

"Or malicious, mean, and delighted to be killing folk with a touch," said Thorn. "In which case he may be less than delighted to flit back home through the Circle. Dathru suggest any ways of getting someone into it who isn't eager to go?"

"Yes, several ways." The sorceress sounded reluctant. "Some of them vile, some deceitful, and some calling for processes which I do not yet understand. Weapon-point might work for humans, but some creatures who roam these worlds seem to have caused Dathru himself mortal terror. I wonder if such creatures could be our farmer-priests' demons?"

"So that's why we're waiting to risk our skins helping Halik fight this one off," Thorn said good-naturedly. "So you can compare it with the demons you've studied in the priests' books. Very many of these bloody rippers around?"

"So far as I can tell from Dathru's notes, the truly terrible ones are few."

"Good. Slicer's a keen sword, but I don't think I could force many Smardons with him. I can see where Halik's trick with those colored beads might come in handy sometimes."

"Perhaps," the sorceress said wryly. "Speaking as the one under coercion, I prefer weapon-point. Although Halik's control was honest compared with Dathru's."

"Well," Thorn compromised, "for defense, I'd use anything I could. Or almost anything. But I don't know sorcery, so we'll have to leave that part to Halik. Speaking of whom..." she added, hearing his boots crunch back toward his threshold. She stood and turned, wanting to keep watch on him but unwilling to voice her doubts.

"His craft is interesting, is it not?" said the sorceress, smiling. "I would return inside with you, but I think I had best learn to see otherworldly auras as soon as possible. That way, if we meet Nimoro, I can tell if he is from another world. I can practice on Dowl, or on my own hand."

"That's right, you said it while we were still outside this flyspeck town—we're all wearing auras here. Well, next time you see me, you can tell me how I look in mine." Thorn gave her friend one light clap on the shoulder, then followed Halik back across his doorstep. As they entered, a sooty-faced youngster was coming in another door, his arms full of dusty charcoal sticks. A kiln of clay bricks at the side of the shop stood open, and soon the lad had kindling blazing beneath the charcoal. Halik put his mold inside, then closed up the kiln. The boy began to pump a long wooden handle that worked the bellows.

"The rest is mere tedium," the Vigen told Thorn. "The fragments of glass must fuse into a single bead." She nodded, sat down, and watched the boy at his labors. As if in rhythm with the steady rush and wheeze of air, her stomach began to grumble. She hoped the people of this world knew how to roast a haunch of meat.

* * *

They did. They also knew how to cook vegetables and porridge. And, once Halik explained the situation, the villagers accepted Frostflower despite her brown eye—as a half-animal freak, maybe, but a friendly one.

In fact, Thorn thought they seemed marginally more willing to trust Frostflower than to trust their own Vigen. Halik explained this with a tale about some renegade glassmaker of long ago who had misused his craft and thus planted distrust toward generations of honest Vigens. Frostflower assured Halik that she understood and sympathized.

While Thorn and Frostflower dined at the nearby inn, the glassmaker returned to his shop. Later, yawning, the two women rejoined him as he sat alone by the closed kiln. The fires had damped, he told them, but the bead must cool slowly.

"If this demon is of your world," said Frostflower, "then forcing it off the cliff into the lake may dispose of it well enough..."

"Unless it's got wings," Thorn remarked. "Don't the farmer-priests have some way of binding demons with wheatstalks and praying them back to hellbog?"

"Who could get close enough to bind Nimoro with anything?" said Halik. "I tell you, the brush of his fingertip is death!"

"But if this demon is from another world," the sorceress cut in, "then I believe it would be best and safest to return him there." She told Halik how, adding, "I think I will be able to see the otherworldly aura if Nimoro has one. I can already see Thorn's quite well. It's attractive, Thorn."

Halik looked dubious. "Suppose you are right. Nimoro has found the way here once. If we send him home, what's to stop him from coming back?"

"Dathru describes a method of fitting a barrier net around reluctant travelers by touching this pendant"—the sorceress held it up on its long chain around her neck—"to a point on the Circle's rim. The net drops off when the travelers slip back into their homeworld, but forms around them once more should they ever again attempt to leave it."

"It'd still be letting the bloodscratcher loose on some population or other," Thorn pointed out. "Not a serious problem for us, of course, unless we ever stray into that particular world."

"But if your friend's guess is true," said Halik, "then we may hope that the inhabitants of Nimoro's own world know better defenses than we have..."

It was past midnight when he finally opened the kiln. "I cannot know how I've done until daylight returns," he confessed as he broke the glossy bead free from the mold. Holding it near his lantern, he furrowed his brow. "The fusing went well," he said. "As for the colors, we'll have to be patient. Come now. It's time we all got some rest."

* * *

GLASSMAKER'S

The travelers slept on thin pallets by the Vigen's hearth in his nearby cottage. Thorn woke with a start when she heard Halik's footsteps. Rolling to her feet, she crouched out of habit, Slicer in hand. A lantern cast wavering shadows across the room.

"Nimoro's come," shouted Halik.

"All right, damn it, don't call the bugger down on us."

As the Vigen approached, Thorn noticed his disheveled look, as if he had dressed hurriedly and not quite finished. Behind him stood a stoop-shouldered man holding a lantern that shook in his hand, making the shadows jump crazily.

Halik lowered his voice, but spoke no less urgently. "The demon's here for certain now. This man's seen tracks."

The glassmaker already had his hands full of talismans. "I'd better take the lamp," Thorn decided, "before that silly pricker drops it."

"Wait!" said the Vigen to Frostflower, offering her a single talisman strung on a looped thong. "This one matches you..." He hesitated, evidently because the stranger was listening, and touched a finger close to his eyes. "Wear the bead," he said quickly. "So my power can't affect you. And lock your dog inside."

They hurried out into the light of dawn—Halik, Thorn and Frostflower. The stoop-shouldered man stayed behind in the cottage. His fear evidently infected Dowl, for Thorn could hear the dog whining and scratching at the door. Frostflower called back a few words of comfort, which didn't stop his noises for long. Thorn was glad when they got more or less out of hearing distance.

She scanned every doorway along that short, brisk walk, looking for signs of an intruder. By the entrance to the inn, which was fully closed now, lay a large dark shape with a smaller shape beside it. The Vigen slowed his pace. Thorn blinked and shook her head.

The remains of a horse—charred and shriveled. And he smaller husk... must have been the rider.

"This is how the demon serves us," said Halik grimly.

"Damn!" Thorn jerked her gaze from the charcoaled bodies and squinted at the road for footprints. She saw some, vaguely like gigantic bird tracks, but scrabbled into confusion. As if the demon had done a joydance around the corpse.

Feeling her neck prickle, Thorn turned. The street behind her remained empty... or was it? Suddenly the outline of a stocky, two-legged figure showed against the sky.

The stranger was decently dressed in tunic and trousers, and approached with a casual gait, but Thorn heard the Vigen hiss between his teeth. The newcomer's arms looked long enough to strike like two venomous snakes.

Halik moved closer to Thorn so that the lantern shone brightly onto his talismans. The swordswoman had yet to study the new-made bead. Now there was time only for a momentary glimpse, as a band of early sunlight crossed the Vigen's hand, drowning the lantern's gleam, so that the talisman glowed with a complex pattern of hues. The bead wasn't that much like her sheen-amber, its shadings tending toward reddish-browns. And it did not shift colors.

But the stranger was almost within range. "Halt!" shouted the Vigen, holding the beads so that his new piece was closest to the lantern.

Now Thorn saw the stranger's face clearly. The eyes were mismatched, but not like her friend's. One sat lifeless, dull gray. The other danced with colors that shifted so quickly she could not be certain what they were. As for the rest, the lips were thick, the cheeks fleshy.

"Frost?" she hissed.

"Yes," came the reply. "The aura... is there."

Nimoro's broad lips turned to a bitter smile. "Another glassmaker?" said the demon to Halik in a high-pitched, grating voice. "Your pitiful beads can't hold me. But I'll enjoy watching you try."

"Turn!" commanded Halik, undaunted.

Thorn looked once more at his talisman and wondered if it could possibly match any hue in the demon's one true eye. Nimoro laughed once more, and the Vigen touched the new bead directly to the hot cover of the lamp. The creature's lips twisted, and for a moment Thorn felt certain that it suffered a twinge of pain. So there had to be some color match there. But then Nimoro advanced again...

Calm as a raidleader, now that they were in the thick of it, Thorn set the lantern down at Halik's side. She reached for the sheath that held her spear Skewer in two pieces for travel, and deftly fit him together for battle.

Frostflower stared with unwilling fascination. The otherworlder's aura did not entirely match his solid outline. Was this the sort of illusion Halik had mentioned?

Nimoro's words destroyed her hope that he was merely a confused wanderer, but they also showed intelligence that might be reasoned with. "Nimoro," she called, "what benefit do you gain from this?"

He flashed her a yellow-toothed grin. "Spiritual satisfaction, lady. I expect you'll give me quite a lot, dying."

"Nothing to the satisfaction I'll get killing you!" said Thorn, hurling her spear directly at the demon.

It fell smoking to the street several paces behind Nimoro. Thorn hadn't missed but Skewer's flight through his chest seemed to give the demon no pain at all. He never even grimaced, as he had when Halik touched the talisman to the lantern's heat.

"Damn and hellbog!" said Thorn.

"I'll get to you in a moment, spearthrower," the demon told her with a leer. Then he continued to stalk Halik.

"Eat stones, fathermilker!" Thorn shouted, making him pause, but only for a heartbeat, to toss her another amused grin. "Frost!" she went on in an undertone. "You understand this bead sorcery?"

"I—"

"Here!" The warrior thrust her sword handle at Frostflower's right hand. "Try this. Might be a closer match than Halik's beads."

The Vigen was retreating at an angle, leading Nimoro farther from the women. Frostflower closed her fingers around the large sheen-amber and concentrated on the demon's aura as if... as if it were a meeting of warm air and cold. She had always found weather conditions easy to manipulate.

Her thought seemed to slip into Nimoro's mind like a blade. She flinched—from both the sensation of stabbing and the fearsome half-glimpsed fancies within his thoughts—but she held tight. "Nimoro, stop!"

The demon jerked, turned to scowl at her. "So! The strangers are trying to sting a little. Maybe they want to go first." He leaned forward, both long arms extended. Frostflower remembered the charred carcasses of horse and rider.

"Stop!" the sorceress called again, hardly knowing why she voiced her command—unless it was to try with simple sound to protect her own mind from the press of Nimoro's thoughts.

The demon stiffened. His face twisted, hinting at his silent struggle, but he came no closer.

"Praise to Ormek!" shouted the glassmaker. "The Lifegiver is working through your jewel."

"Praise to Frostflower," Thorn grunted, very low. "All right, Frost, if you can prop the Circle up and stand away from it—"

"I must keep one hand on it, Thorn. Or it will not enlarge."

With visible strain, Nimoro forced one leg forward. Feeling that single step like shudder in her own will, the sorceress redoubled her effort. But there was no sense of triumph in her success, only pain. This was the same thing that Halik had done to her yesterday, and too much like what Dathru had done when he had forced her to his will. Thorn was saying, "Can you at least wrap something—your robe—around your hand and arm?"

"Yes." Right hand still on the sheen-amber, the sorceress managed to flip some folds of her robe about her left hand where she grasped the Circle. Would it be enough to protect her from the demon's touch? she wondered, as she held Dathru's portal out at arm's-length. "Nimoro! We offer you safe return to your homeworld—"

The demons' breath came out with a hiss and returned with a rattle, while his glittering eye widened to twice the size of the dull gray one. "How would you know?" he asked despairingly. "How in Gobashak's name would you know anything about it?" Again he strained to come at her. Once more her will held him... but her doubts grew.

"Good, Frost, good!" her friend applauded.

"Thorn, he doesn't want to go home! I can feel it."

Desperately, she reasoned that Nimoro understood the harm he did, delighted in it, traveled among these worlds reveling in doing it. Reason had helped her save herself from Halik's bead spell, but it failed her now. "Oh God! How can I force anyone?"

* * *

Damn! Thorn thought, and muttered, "How's it done?"

"One... simply concentrates..."

The whole bloody secret of Tanglelands sorcery, too! Except that these otherworldly new versions used tools. And—maybe—didn't need such strenuous disciplines. "All right, just keep him standing there," the warrior went on, squeezing her fingers in around her friend's. Fortunately, the sheen-amber was big enough to let them both touch it at once. She fixed her gaze on Nimoro, felt distracted by his grimaces, shut her eyes and tried to imagine how he'd look diving through the Circle. Tried hard...

Halik shouted. Thorn opened her eyes. The demon had taken two steps forward. By the way he halted and glared at her, she understood that she had forced him to take those steps.

"Thorn." The sorceress sounded calm. "I cannot keep him standing there, when you are trying to bring him forward."

Thorn didn't usually overlook points like that. Fighting with sorcery must be confusing her battle sense. She revised her command: "Just keep the bugger from touching us." Then she shut her eyes again, to recapture the image of Nimoro jumping through the Circle. She heard the demon grunting, felt the ground quiver beneath his jerky stride, sensed the pulse racing in her friend's fingers. Judging she had a grip on the mental picture, she opened her eyes to check it against reality.

Nimoro was within three strides of the Circle. He was shaking all over, sweat streaming down his

cheeks. But given a moment's freedom, those long arms could reach Frostflower's face. His near hand was rising... slowly, but it was coming up.

The Circle rested steadily in Frostflower's cloth-draped left hand, and Nimoro was leaning forward. For all Thorn's efforts, he was breaking loose. His other arm shifted...

And all at once his grin contorted. Sucking breath hard, he doubled over, his hands clutching at his single real eye.

Thorn glanced around, saw Halik. The glassmaker had opened his lantern and was dangling his new talisman in the center of the flame. Despite her protection against the Vigen's sorcery, Forstflower blinked and trembled. Even Thorn felt pain jabbing at her—because she was in touch with Nimoro's mind, no doubt.

"Thorn, move away," said the sorceress. "Move out of reach." She released the sheen-amber and dropped into a crouch, still holding out the Circle but crooking her other arm to bury her face in her sleeve. With Frostflower's restraining influence gone, the demon started regaining his freedom. Panting and grimacing, he made it up to one knee.

"I'm losing the mudlicker!" Thorn shouted.

"One will against him is not enough," Halik answered. "Perhaps not even two. But with your jewel... " He grabbed for Frost's old place on the sheen-amber. Thorn kept her grip, letting Halik's fingers slip between hers as both aimed their thoughts at the demon.

Rising from his crouch, Nimoro made a swipe that almost caught Thorn's boot. She yanked it back into a safer stance.

"Dive!" the Vigen shouted. The swordswoman put all her strength into that one image: Nimoro diving through.

The demon loosed a last shriek of defiance. But, arms flailing, he pitched forward and through the Circle. Thorn opened her eyes just in time to see her vision realised.

"Close it!" she shouted to Frost; and added, to the demon, "Break your nose, bogbait!"

Dathru's Circle, door-height long enough for Nimoro's passage, dwindled back to its handspan diameter. The sorceress caught the pendant and touched it to a score of points on the Circle's rim. Then she sat back, breathing deeply.

Thorn and Halik stooped close to follow her gaze. A net of copper-colored lines had appeared across the Circle, and Nimoro, looking no larger than Thorn's middle finger, was throwing himself against the meshes, mouthing furious epithets. His true eye glowed wildly, as if it could no longer see anything beyond the net. Behind him, backgrounds of various worlds replaced one another at each heartbeat.

Green worlds, blue, white, reddish-brown... At last one appeared that held for several heartbeats: a world of muck-green leaves and stagnant-looking water. Nimoro tumbled into it and stood knee deep in brown ooze, shaking both fists at the sky. His shape began to change, but before the final form was apparent, three large-headed, lizardlike beings stepped into the scene. They wore skintight crimson trousers, and their chests were covered with loops that looked like necklaces, untill they took them off and used them to bind Nimoro.

The copper-colored net faded into invisibility as the three lizardlike creatures led Nimoro, looking much like his captors now, into the scraggly forest.

"Well!" Thorn remarked. "So he's even an outlaw in his own world."

"And little doubt but that they are leading him to judgment," Frostflower added. With a sigh, she allowed the Circle to mist over.

"Well, Frost," the swordswoman asked, "what about it? Did they look like farmer-priests' demons?"

The sorceress shook her head. "Not in the form Nimoro wore here. I mght have said that the lizardmen resembled some priests' conceptions of minor demons, but the three who led Nimoro away hardly appeared malicious."

"Glad to hear you say it. I thought they were downright handsome, for lizards. Especially the middle one. Not that I'm eager to visit their world."

Frostflower went on, "I must pray that I never meet a true demon of the farmer-priests. When my courage failed at the end with Nimoro..."

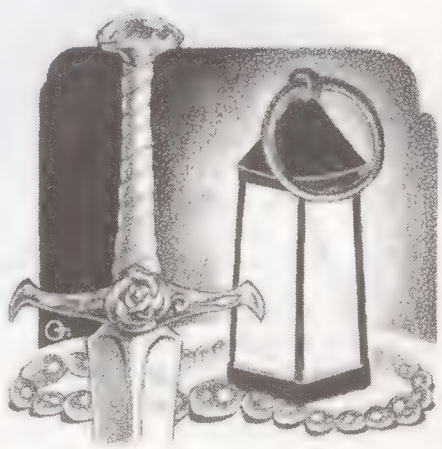
The warrior snorted. "Bogsteam! Your courage didn't fail. You just weren't shaped to twist anyone's will, Frost."

"A noble spirit, impractical as it may be," said Halik to Frostflower. "My regret is all the greater, my friend, for putting you to such pain yesterday."

Thorn agreed with the glassmaker. He might not be a trained warrior, but after his work today, she'd have trusted him on her side in any battle. How many men could she say that about? "As long as we're apologizing, Reverence Vigen, I owe you a good one. After seeing what you people were afraid of, I'd say you used up a lot of courage yesterday. As well as today." She squinted at her spear where it lay in the road. "Well, I hope we can salvage Skewer. He was a good little weapon. But first we'd better go let that mangy mongrel out of your house before he paws a hole in the door, or whines himself to death. And then we can all get some breakfast."

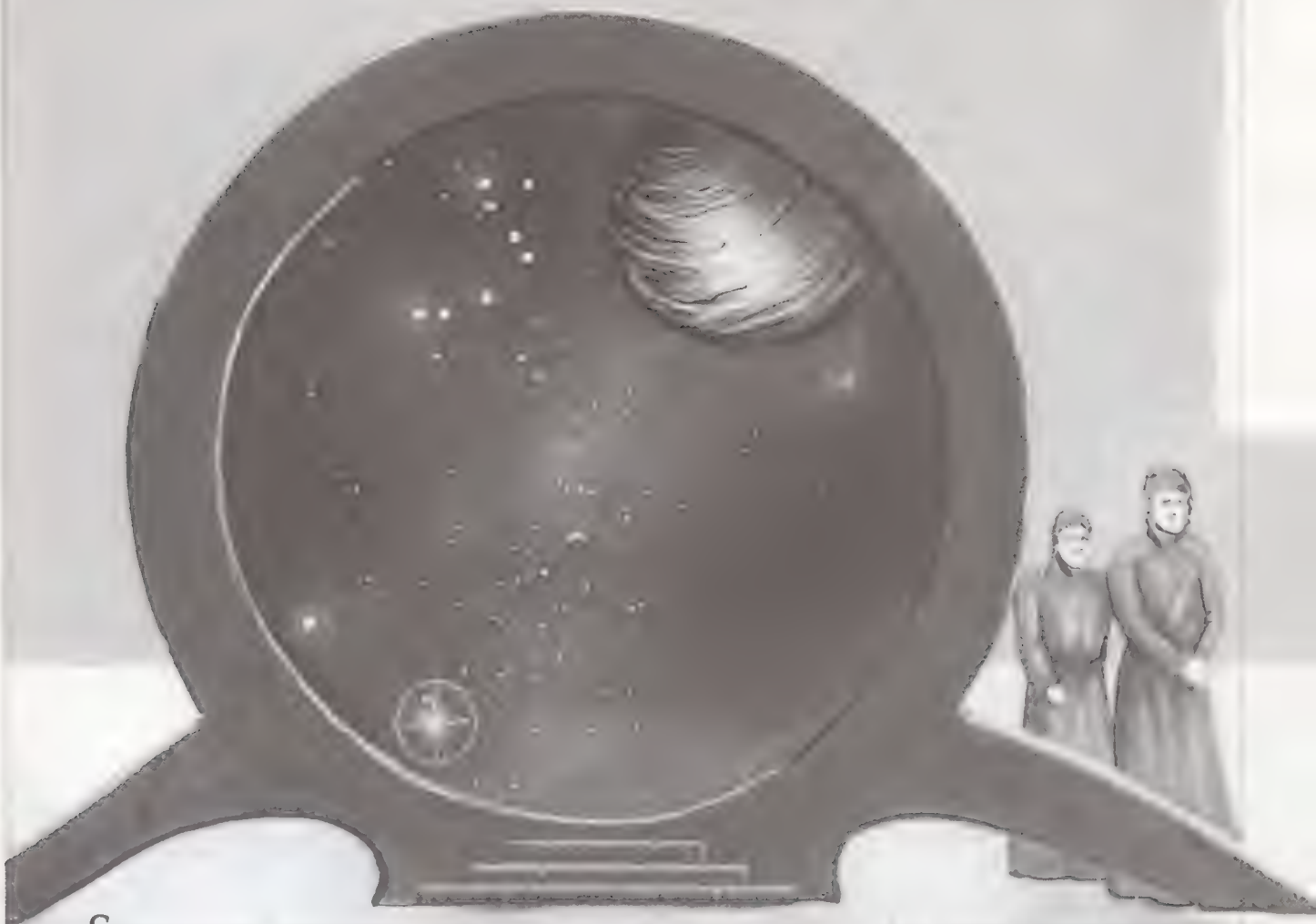
M. Coleman Easton

Phyllis Ann Karr



A Flower from the Dust of Khedderide

by Pat Cirone



Silivera walked, black robed, amidst the swirling colors others wore. While not the only southerner who had moved up here, to the mushrooming town of Khedderide, jhe was probably the only one who persisted in wearing the black, day in and day out. It was easy to ignore the occasional surprised comments.

With a bound, Silivera leapt up the last two stairs to the narrow level where the shops for their section were cut into the cliff. A mischievous smile flickered around the edges of jhes mouth and jhe entered the produce shop.

"Ah, Belder! I'll have some kuai fruit, a nice large portion of sketer root, and maybe some zircot grain."

Belder leaned massive arms, clothed in filmy pink, on the bare counter and looked with Silivera at the colorful paintings of fruits, grains and vegetables that lined the

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walls, and provided such a stark contrast to the dusty, empty shelves.

"Would you like some puli-puli, too?" the grocer inquired genially, nodding to a picture of an exotic fruit difficult to obtain, even in the south.

"Yes!" Silivera exclaimed, enchanted.

The grocer leaned back, chuckling, and began to measure out the ubiquitous kwaicarat. It was the only crop that grew close enough to the edge of the desert to be delivered regularly. Everyone was sick of the black and white striped grain, and Silivera was no exception. It was kwaicarat bread for morning, cold kwaicarat for midday, and fried kwaicarat for evening. And lucky to get that. If the population continued to outrun the transport, they'd have to start using a Gate to import food, and that was against the Code, which demanded that communities be self-reliant.

Silivera put the ration books down on the counter and began to slap at the pale dust clinging to the bottom of jhes knee-length black robe.

"When are you going to start wearing some sensible clothes?" Belder asked.

Silivera looked up with a rueful grin. "These do show the dust, don't they? But I just don't feel comfortable in colors. In the South, colors are never worn for anything but nightclothes."

"What do they do to you Southerners to make you so rigid? You're what? Nineteen? Twenty? And already you're too old to change. Let go of all those petty rules you grew up with!"

"Next you'll be wanting me to foreswear the Code!" Silivera retorted in mock horror.

"You don't wear the Code on your skin. I walk in as much honor as any crow-decked Southerner!"

"I know, I know. Just call me eccentric." Silivera tried to sooth the grocer, who was starting to take this too personally. Sometimes jhe wondered if it wouldn't be easier to change to colors, make everyone more comfortable. But it wouldn't be honest. Jhe'd still be a Southerner, no matter what jhe wore. Wearing colors wouldn't be right; it would be a deception. Jhe'd rather struggle through misunderstandings like this than be dishonest in the way jhe met life.

"Ah, you. I think you just want to stand out. Maybe you're young, after all."

"It doesn't hurt to stand out sometimes," Silivera replied, glad that the conversation had bounced back to a lighter tone. "You need something to be noticed in this sea of strange faces."

"Oh, I don't think you'd have a problem. But speaking of strangers..." Belder reached beneath the counter and pulled a large sketer root up from the depths. Jhe plunked it down and waited for Silivera's reaction.

Silivera stared at it as if it were an off-world animal, before snatching the dusty tuber up and hugging it to jhes breast. "To think I used to take these for granted!"

The grocer chuckled. "Time brings a glow to all memories?"

"Rationing brings a glow to anything. Even sketer roots!"

"I've heard we might get some tapier grain in next week. Do you want me to set some aside for you?"

"Yes! I'll even give you the ration coupons now. Anything for a change from kwaicarat."

"No, no, keep your coupons until it comes in," the grocer said, handing jher the bag of striped grain, and subtracting just the day's allotment of coupons for a family of three from the ration books. Chimes rang and more customers came into the store, their boots swishing against the wooden floor. Silivera said goodbye to the grocer and left, plunging back into the sun.

The narrow sideway was hard beneath jhes feet; like all the paths in Khedderide, it had been carved right out of the cliff. Silivera angled across to the open side, leaned against the wall and looked out over the city.

Khedderide always reminded jher of a jewel, basking under the sun, each tier one more carved facet. Facets that clung to the cliffs, narrow and rocky, with heartstopping drops between. Silivera loved it: its beauty, its newness, its row upon row of identical white houses with gleaming blue roof tiles that seemed to capture and hold bits of the vivid sky. It was hard to believe that just ten years ago there had been nothing here, nothing but a few halauks, circling, trying to wrest a meal from the barren desert.

That had been before kerillian ore, needed to maintain the busy Gates between all the worlds of the Sectors, had been discovered in these cliffs. Now dusty roads snaked in across the Kassian desert and Khedderide had sprung from nothing. Silivera leaned forward, trying to catch a glimpse of government center, wondering if jhe might spot Ricel's blonde head. But the angle was wrong, and jhe couldn't see even a corner of the large buildings hurriedly built to accommodate the citizenship needs of nearly seventy thousand people.

Silivera pushed back from the wall, grimaced at the streaks of white it had left on jhes robe, and started walking home. Little Dafire would be waiting. The thought speeded jher up.

"Vera!" The call spun Silivera around. Ricel was hurrying towards jher. Silivera's tripped into an extra beat.

Laughing, Ricel caught up, and gave Silivera a quick hug. Silivera savored the moment, acknowledging to jherself the ridiculousness of feeling so breathless over someone jhe'd lived with for a year and a half.

It had been that way from the first sight of that blonde head, back when jhe had thought blonde hair was foreign and might even mean its possessor was male or female, from one of the dual-sexed worlds. Even that had not stopped Silivera

from moving forward to meet the stranger.

Silivera had since learned that such blonde-haired, tan-skinned beauty was common in the far north, where Ricel came from, and that Ricel was as androgynous as the rest of the natives of the planet Rocque. But the heady rush of that first meeting was still with jher.

"What are you doing here? And where's Dafire?" Ricel was asking.

"I left Dafire next door, with Soel. I was called for a job interview. And I got the job! A permanent one, not a temp, like I've been working!"

"Great. Where?"

"Up at Blue Shaft."

"Not in the mines!"

"No, no. Paperwork. Their supply manager left to lay the groundwork for the new shaft. They needed a replacement. The coordinator wasn't too happy that I was so young, but jhe said my credentials were the best of those that applied, so I got the job."

"Now you'll have a niche of your own."

"Ummm. I've been so frustrated, seeing everyone else working to build this city, while all I could get was fiddling temps. Thank God I've had Dafire to look after, these last six months. That's one drawback—even though it's an office job, there's too much dust from the mine for a baby. I'll miss not having Dafire with me every second of the day. Perhaps Soel would be willing to watch Dafire for us, as long as jhe's out with that leg injury. By the time jhe's ready to go back to work, we'll have had the time to link up with a good tradetime group. But just think of all Dafire's 'firsts' I'll miss!" moaned Silivera.

"Like me. I've already missed more than I've seen," Ricel replied. Silivera nodded, but inside jhe was thinking that it wasn't the same. For all that Ricel had borne the baby, jhe didn't love jher as much as Silivera did.

When they picked up Dafire from Soel's, the baby was so anxious to nurse, that jhe nearly squirmed out of Ricel's arms.

"Hey, watch that!" Ricel exclaimed breathlessly, laughing as jhe tried to juggle the baby. Silivera dropped the bag of kwaicarat and thrust a quick hand against the baby's bottom, until Ricel could rearrange jhes grip.

"Thanks, Vera."

"Quick, let's get in before the monster squirms loose again!" Silivera laughed. Jhe palmed open their door and they struggled in. Ricel quickly shed jhes working clothes, stepped into a nursing robe and sank into a chair to nurse Dafire. Silivera memorized the sight, as jhe did every night, of the two blonde heads nestled so near each other.

> Jhe'd rather struggle through misunderstandings like this than be dishonest in the way jhe met life.

Then, jhe turned to the wall that passed as a kitchen, rinsed the dust off the grain jhe'd dropped, and threw it into a frying pan.

Silivera talked as jhe stirred the grain. "I think my blacks stood me in good stead, today. The shaft coordinator was a Southerner. I think the only reason jhe took a chance on someone so young was jhe felt I would be imbued with the ethic of doing things with grace and formality rather than the slapdash way you northerners operate."

Ricel laughed. "You and your 'Southern Traditions.' Did you explain your parents shunted you up here because they thought you were too much of a rebel?"

"No." Silivera grinned.

"A big mistake when it comes to you: judging by the black, instead of the mischief in your eye."

"Maybe not. Otherwise, why can't I switch to colors like other Southerners do?"

"Because you know you look stunning in black." Ricel got up and nuzzled the back of Silivera's neck. Dafire gave an indignant snort, and stopped nursing long enough to push at Silivera's back with a chubby fist. Ricel laughed and sat down again. Dafire fixed an indignant blue stare on jhes parent's face, before the nursing made jhes eyes sink blissfully shut again.

"Seriously, though," Silivera continued, "sometimes it's disgusting just how much I have absorbed my parents' attitudes."

"I wouldn't worry, if I were you," Ricel laughed. "You're the least conventional person I know. Even your wearing of the black is a sign of it: no one else wears clothes because they're a sign of inner convictions! Only you, Vera, only you." Ricel shifted to start burping Dafire, and watched Silivera's quick, precise movements as jhe set the table. "You're just an interesting collection of odd quirks."

Silivera slid the steaming mixture of grain and sketer root down onto the table. "As long as you keep the word 'interesting' in there." Jhe glanced up. The laughter stilled, and they exchanged a long look. Silivera glowed as they sat down to eat.

After dinner, Ricel pushed up from the table, and slowly started to stack the dishes while Silivera mashed some of the food to feed Dafire.

"How soon do you start work?" Ricel asked.

"Next week. I don't suppose...do you think you could get some time off before then? Once I start work, it will be even harder to get together to sign contracts."

"Oh, Vera. You know the hours I keep. It's hopeless. Is it really so necessary to do it right now? I mean, we've signed intentions, I'm not avoiding marriage, but time off this week? When we've just started surveying a new tract? Impossible."

Flower

"Yes, I thought so," Silivera sighed.

"I know, Vera. You want to be married: contracts written and signed. I want to, too. It's just..."

Silivera looked as cheerful as possible. "Don't worry, Ricel, we'll get to it eventually. This will just have to be one of my 'Southern Traditions' I'll have to change." Jhe scooped the dishes out of Ricel's hands and headed for the sink, missing the baffled, wistful look on Ricel's face.

After a short period of silence, Ricel spoke. "Did you hear they finished paving the road in from the north, today?"

"So that's why Belder is expecting tapier grain next week!"

Ricel snorted. "I bet more people arrive before enough food does. I wish they'd put a limit on immigration here, at least until my department gets a chance to take care of the housing shortage."

"Forget it. Kerillian's too important. The more people they have, the more shafts they can open up," Silivera countered practically. "There's four already, and a fifth opening up. How greedy can you get?"

"With the deposits on Thuneau, Ridlelle and Actue mined out? Pretty greedy. Every transport gate and every transport bracelet made, needs kerillian. And every newly joined planet wants to be on Sectors' net as fully and as quickly as possible. Especially those who don't follow the Arian way, and want a Gate every few blocks, so they don't have to do anything for themselves. No, the deposits here will be mined to the last inch, regardless of the cost."

Ricel sighed and sank into a chair. "I suppose you're right. I'll just have to get used to the pace."

Silivera leaned against the chair and passed a hand through Ricel's blonde hair. "Rough day, hmmm?"

"God, yes. Norill was screaming Rylie'd placed half jhes markers wrong—you know Norill's pleasant manner—and Rylie swore jhe'd sunk them correctly, and by the end of the day no one in the department was speaking to anyone else, for fear of setting off more explosions."

Ricel shook jhes head and closed jhes eyes tiredly. Silivera gave jher an extra caress and sunk down onto the floor to play with Dafire. Ricel leaned over to pick up a half-made crawlie for Dafire that needed hemming.

"Look at that!" Silivera exclaimed a few moments later. "Dafire's stacked three of them together!" Jhe looked up, but Ricel's blonde head had fallen against the side of the chair. Silivera smiled ruefully. "Wait here, Daf," jhe said, patting the baby on the back. Silivera went over to Ricel's chair and, quietly maneuvering the sleeper into jhes arms, carried jher into the bedroom they shared. Ricel never stirred. Silivera stood there for a moment, looking at the tousled blonde hair which had seemed so exotic to jhes southern eyes when they had first met. Then Silivera swung back through the door and walked over to where Dafire had stopped playing with blocks in favor of gnawing on them.

Silivera idly removed the block from the small mouth and watched with a slight smile as the baby promptly stuck a different one in. Jhes child Precious, lovable, and half jhes... and not jhes at all. Only if there was a marriage contract could a parent claim a child jhe'd fathered.

In the South it would have been a scandal to conceive, let alone bear, a child out of contract. But here, mores were less rigid. Ricel didn't see anything wrong, as long as they got married eventually. So they remained a couple living together, with a child born between them, and no marriage contract. It bothered Silivera to the depths. It seemed ridiculous to put so much stock into a piece of paper, but it was the way jhe'd been brought up. Jhe'd never forget the shock when Ricel announced jhe had gotten pregnant without that paper. And every time someone asked if Dafire was jhes baby, jhe choked on the yes, knowing that, under the Code that was the law of all of Rocque, both North and South, jhe had no legal right to call Dafire jhes, without that piece of paper. With a sigh, Silivera picked up the crawlie Ricel had dropped and finished hemming it.

Silivera waited outside the Records Hall for over an hour. Ricel had said jhe'd be able to get off early. Silivera had put in for an hour off, and hurried over. They'd have the contracts drawn up, and arrange for a signing date. But Ricel never showed. When the whisper of the evening breeze began, Silivera gave up and headed home.

Ricel dragged home, dusty, later than usual, and discouraged.

"I tried, Vera."

"What happened?"

"Norill blew up. Said the last set of sites I'd surveyed were all crooked. I had to go out and do them all over again. I swear, Vera, I know I'm tired, but I'm not so tired I'm careless. They were so off you could tell by just looking at the flags marking the corners. Someone must have moved them."

"But that's beyond mischief! What if it hadn't been caught and the houses had been built wrong on the cliff? It could have endangered people's lives! That's a gross breach of the Code!"

Ricel looked as grim as Silivera felt. "It isn't the first time markers have moved mysteriously. I can't see how...it can't be kids. Those flags have to be drilled into the rock. And there weren't any other holes." Ricel shrugged. "Oh, maybe I am getting so tired I can't see straight. The only other explanation is the cliff moved. And that's impossible; this area is stable. If it isn't we're in trouble. All those mine shafts." Ricel shuddered.

"Don't be so fast to dismiss kids. They can be pretty clever. And they don't always think too far ahead...still, they must have known they were going too far, even if they didn't realize their actions could be breaking the Code." Silivera shook

jhes head. The Code was something learned from birth on; to break it was to say you disdained the rights of others. You walked outside of them.

Weeks passed. There never seemed to be a second opportunity to meet at the Records Hall to draw up the contracts, let alone sign them. Silivera didn't have time to let it depress jher; jhe was busy proving to the Blue Shaft coordinator that jhe had been right to hire a seventeen-year-old with only temporary jobs for experience. Despite the satisfaction the job gave, the best part of the day was going home, to Dafire and Ricel. That was the center of existence. When the evening breezes sighed along the cliffs, Silivera would plunge down from the cliffs into the fairy tale tapestry of twinkling lights. Silivera's hours were almost as long as Ricel's, now. It was pitch dark when jhe'd arrive at Soel's to pick up Dafire. Still, Silivera never seemed as tired as Ricel, so jhe kept the burden of most of Dafire's care, as well as the larger portion of the housework.

Ricel objected, but Silivera just laughed and told jher to rest while jhe could, because jhe planned to be the next one to bear a baby and then jhe'd be the one exhausted with nursing and working and child care. Truthfully, Silivera enjoyed having the excuse to hog the care of Dafire. As the youngest in jhes family, jhe'd never had the care of an infant before. Silivera was astonished at how much jhe enjoyed it, and was eager for more children, even if jhe had to do it without a marriage contract.

One night Ricel came home late, almost at Dafire's bed time, but jhe looked happy.

"I wrestled a promise from Norill for the afternoon of tomorrow! No matter what happens, I'll meet you at the Records Hall; we'll draw up the contracts and sign them then and there."

Silivera looked up from cleaning the table and smiled all the way from the toes.

Ricel threw jherself into a chair and motioned for Silivera to come over. Silivera stopped to scoop up Dafire, plumped the two of them into the chair beside Ricel and grinned at Ricel's blonde-topped face. "What?"

"Let's celebrate!"

"Celebrate? It's almost Dafire's bedtime. We can't go out now."

"There's more than one way of celebrating. We hardly ever save any time for ourselves. Either I'm asleep or at work, or you're busy with the house and Dafire."

"I know. But we are together." Silivera's smile began to dance. "And we had a nice courtship."

"That was a year and a half ago. And it didn't last long enough," Ricel murmured, freeing Silivera's hair from Dafire's grasp to run jhes own fingers through it. "So, let's celebrate the last night we'll be unmarried."

Silivera lingered under Ricel's touch for a moment before murmuring: "Let me settle Dafire down for the night." Ricel smiled and followed. Jhe watched, lazy eyes, as Silivera changed Dafire and tucked

Flower

jher into the crib. Then Ricel closed the door softly and the two walked arm in arm into their own bedroom.

Dasday was clear and beautiful, the sky a blue so molten it was deeper than the tiles on the roofs. Silivera worked swiftly, sparking with the knowledge jhe'd be meeting Ricel at the Hall of Records in just four hours. They'd have to skip wearing the red: there was no time to shop for wedding robes. But Soel had promised to bring Dafire to greet them outside the private chambers after they had traced the ritual marriage signs on each other's faces. Silivera wished jhes parents could be there for the celebration feast—but of course then jhe'd have to explain the existence of Dafire, precontract... It would be nice being just Ricel, Dafire and Soel, too. Silivera smiled, imagining.

The ground moved beneath jhes feet, pressing against the soles, then fading away. Silivera looked up, startled.

A low rumble built, became a thudding roar that shook both skull and chest. Silivera tried to stand. The ground jerked and bobbed.

Silivera staggered against the room. Made it to the doorway. A cloud of pale grey dust was rising from the city below, obscuring the view. In a slow dance, it started to eddy, then settle with the breezes. Silivera's breath caught. Jhe clung to the door and stared, horrified, at the tumbled swaths of blue roof tiles and broken walls.

Another rumble. Silivera watched as the cliff face below Red Shaft shrugged and parted from the rocks behind, carrying houses and streets into dusty oblivion.

Silivera stood, in a state that felt like calm, and waited for the rumble that would carry Blue Shaft, and jher, away.

It didn't come. At last jhe left the door and walked back to the desk. Moving delicately, jhe gathered scattered paperwork into neat piles and filed it in the trays. Picked up the drinking glass that had fallen. Straightened the chart on the wall.

When there was nothing left to tidy, jhe had to let the knowledge seep in. Trembling slightly, jhe started the climb down to the city. The staircase from Blue Shaft was littered with rocks and cracked in places, but it was passable. Below was different.

Cries filled the air. A figure erupted from the broken rocks beside Silivera...

Silivera had to scramble. The sideways were more rubble than street. In several places, slides had wiped out any trace of habitation. The rocks were quiet, now, except for an occasional trickle of sand.

Cries filled the air. A figure erupted from the broken rocks beside Silivera, shook the dust from shock-blinded eyes and stared at the scene; then turned and started scrabbling at the chaos behind, calling a name. Others were doing the same, up and down what had been the sideway. Silivera threaded a way through them. The closer to home, the swifter jhe hurried, breath rasping painfully, tearing jagged rents in the blanket of shock.

One last featureless slide. Silivera scrambled across, then stood and looked for landmarks. A shop sign was sticking out of the debris. Oh Honor! It was Belder's, all that was left of the produce shop. Silivera looked for the staircase that had wound down to their level. It was gone; covered or swept away, Silivera couldn't tell which. Bracing feet as best as possible, jhe slid down. A number painted on a jagged portion of a wall gave some bearings. Silivera turned right and counted along the heaps of rubble to Soel's number.

Hands tore quickly on the gritty, sharp-edged pieces. Silivera's began to leave a bloody trail. Jhe stopped, ripped off a piece of tunic and wrapped them. The hands became black flags moving among the rocks. Muffled crying spurred jher to frantic activity. Silivera called and called to Dafire as jhe scrambled and heaved. Jhes voice grew harsh; sobs came unbidden. Unknown hands began to help as jhe fought and wiggled and pushed a way through. First Dafire's foot was uncovered. Then a hand. Gently Silivera pulled the wildly sobbing baby from a miraculously protective triangle of broken walls. No blood. No injuries that jhe could see. Silivera hugged Dafire so close, the baby started to cry harder.

Silivera sat, shook, kept sobbing over Dafire while the others went on searching for Soel. A warden came by, passing out colored construction flags. Houses were marked: blue for those already searched or whose occupants were accounted for, red for all the rest. Silivera stuck a blue in the rubble that had been their home. Ricel wouldn't have been there, and jhe and Dafire were accounted for. Jhe went back to the seat on the sunny rock by Soel's home, and hunched protectively over Dafire. Soel's body was found an hour later. Only then did Silivera feel free to walk to government center to find Ricel.

Silivera walked unhearing through a confused babble of sobs, hurried talk and cries for loved ones, doctors, help. Dafire took jhes head out of Silivera's shoulder and peered with interest at the milling crowds. Silivera tried to stop the tremors that still shook through jher. Jhe had the baby. Dafire was

alive and unhurt. The tremors came anyway, as jhes sandaled feet traced their way over the rubble.

Silivera approached government center by the back of the Records Hall without even remembering this was to have been their marriage day. That special day seemed years ago. Silivera rounded the side of the building and dug sandals into the ground in a sudden stop. Jhes hand wavered as it reached for the wall beside jher, for support. A gaping wound of scoured rock met jhes eyes. The cliff had sheared completely away at this point, carrying half the Records Hall and the rest of government center with it. Silivera drifted forward to peer down at the featureless jumble of grey rocks and dust that spread to the valley floor. Tears choked throat and eyes: never to see Ricel's blonde hair again! Without a sound jhe turned around and started heading up the cliffs to where the warden had said tents for the homeless were being erected.

Hope returned after food and rest. Maybe Ricel had been out surveying a site, maybe jhe had already left to get ready for the ceremony at the Records Hall. Silivera changed the flag on their house from blue to red and entered Ricel's name among the thousands of missing, opposite their own location in case Ricel was seeking them. Then jhe joined one of the search teams. Silivera knew jhes skills would be better suited to organizing relief efforts or helping Records in their efforts to re-unite families and establish order among the lost and scattered vital records. But there was something numbing in the hard physical labor that satisfied a driving need. Jhe kept quiet and spent the days heaving aside the rubble of the red-flagged buildings, searching for victims, living or dead.

Each night Silivera arrived back at the tent, shaky with exhaustion. Jhe'd scan the message board hopefully, and then quietly strip off the grimy dust mask, rinse filthy, scratched hands in the shallow bucket of communal water, and pick up Dafire from those who had volunteered to care for the children, to free the more physically able. Carrying Dafire, Silivera would go over to their own small partition, feed the baby, then hold Dafire close.

Silivera lost track of the grey days. Numb surprise greeted the realization, upon asking the day, that a week had passed since the quake. That day Silivera found it hard to believe Ricel might still be alive.

The ache of that knowledge so filled Silivera that jhe barely heard what the care-giver was saying when jhe entered the tent that night. At first.

"I think you should stay in tomorrow and rest, dear. Your milk supply must be down, the way your baby has been taking it from the bottle during the day. I don't mean to complain but we're so short of even the powdered milk, we want to save it for those babies who no longer have mothers to nurse them."

"Yes, of course," Silivera mumbled as Dafire was handed over. Jhe walked away swiftly. Once behind their private partition, Silivera trembled.

Dafire. Jhe would lose Dafire. Without a marriage contract there was no way jhe could claim the baby as jhes own. Wasn't it enough that she had lost Ricel? Now Dafire would be sent to Ricel's family. A family that had never seen or wanted to see the child. A family whose shock at Ricel's desire to marry someone they didn't know, and a Southerner, had led them to cut off all relations, It just wasn't fair!

Tears blurred Silivera's vision as Dafire squirmed free of a too tight grip and began to crawl around the cot. Poor Dafire. Mother gone, only a father left. Silivera wondered if the baby noticed what a drastic change had occurred. Dafire had been quieter, had clung to Silivera more in the evenings. Of course, Dafire had been missing the mother that had nursed jher! Silivera had been numb. Now the thought pierced. How could jhe have been so blind? How would Dafire react to losing Silivera, too? Silivera, the one who had loved and cared for jher from the minute jhe had left Ricel's womb.

When would jhe bring jherself to notify the officials of Dafire's position? Jhe'd wait for the bureaucracy to catch up with the fact jhe wasn't the baby's mother.

For the next two weeks Silivera walked with but one refrain: jhe was going to lose Dafire. The tears that spattered the dust weren't just for Ricel now, they were for Dafire also.

The day came that Silivera was assigned to help clear the Records Hall.

Silivera learned that the birth records had been held in the section which had been sheared away. For the adults, like Silivera, it was no more than an inconvenience; another copy could be obtained from the place of birth. But Dafire had been born here. There had never been any reason to file a copy elsewhere. Silivera asked casually what was being done in such cases and was told new certificates were being made as fast as possible; parents, or the nearest surviving relative, gave the information.

Silivera returned to the tent that evening, and as jhe rinsed face and hands in the tent's gritty bucket of water, there was a whisper in jhes head. *It would be easy.* All jhe'd have to do was state Dafire was jhes born child instead of fathered child...

No! That went against the Code. It even had a name and number all its own: kidnapping. Dafire belonged to Ricel's family and to Ricel's family jhe would go. In fact, to resist temptation, Silivera would go, first thing tomorrow, to the tent serving as a temporary shelter for the Hall of Records and start the proceedings.

The next morning Silivera reported to the regular work crew. The rescue work was more important, jhe argued to jherself. Even though it had been eight days since anyone had been found alive, there might still be *someone* clinging to life be-

low the rubble...shame coiled inside Silivera's breast. Jhe knew that wasn't the reason jhe was sifting through dust and rocks instead of filling out paperwork.

That night Silivera had a headache from the thoughts that fought in jhes head. Honor, love, loneliness, and fear vieing with each other, leaving only confusion. Was Right always right? One part of Silivera shuddered at the wrongness of what jhe was toying with; another part shouted it was not wrong at all. Silivera shook jhes head. It was impossible, so why even consider it?

But the whisper kept coming back. Was it so impossible? Was it? Jhe and Ricel had been too wrapped up in each other to have many friends—there were few who could be certain which had borne the babe. Soel, of course, but jhe was dead. Probably several of Ricel's co-workers had at least known jhe was pregnant. But could they swear that Dafire was the baby? Simultaneous pregnancies were rare, but not impossible, and Ricel had never taken Dafire in to work with jher... They were probably all dead with Ricel, anyway.

And jhe had been too ashamed to write and tell jhes parents jhe had fathered a child without contract. Jhe could just switch to the equal shame of having borne a child precontract.

But, even if jhe managed, somehow, to fool all these people, would jhe be able to live with jherself? To go against the Code? To walk outcast? Even if no one else knew it, jhe would always know.

Kidnapping. It had an ugly ring. Under the Code it didn't matter that jhe loved the babe: other unwedded fathers had surely loved their children before. This did not change the law that said children belonged to those that bore them, unless a contract said otherwise. The hand of anyone who had ever borne a child, loved, and guarded it from harm, would be against jher.

Would Ricel's family bother to trace jher? Silivera wasn't even sure if they knew of Dafire's existence. They had returned all of Ricel's letter after that one telling them Ricel

had filed intentions with someone here. Without ever a meeting, they had condemned Silivera simply because jhe was not one of the few they had already picked as suitable for Ricel.

Honor had probably demanded they forget Silivera's name!

Umbrage turned to thoughtfulness. There was a good chance they didn't know Silivera's name. Ricel had so hated the name Silivera, jhe had always called jher "Vera". And if Silivera remembered right, Ricel had deliberately omitted Silivera's last name from that letter, wanting them to accept Silivera for jherself, and not for jhes family connection. So, even if they knew Ricel had had a child, they would be seeking a Dafire Tojer, born of Ricel Tojer and some unknown Vera. Not Daffy Aubochon, child of Silivera.

Silivera looked at the sleeping Dafire. If jhe walked outside the Code and took the baby, jhe would never be able to marry: it would be easy to notice that jhes body carried no trace of having borne a child. Besides, jhe would never ask someone jhe loved to step outside the Code for jher. Bad enough jhe was doing it to jherself. That was the question: could jhe spend jhes entire life alone, with just Dafire: no lifemate, no family, no more children? And always with the knowledge that jhe walked outside the Code, eating at jher?

Jhe stared again at Dafire's blonde head and jhes heart wrenched. Jhe would never be whole, or at peace, again. Which was it to be: love? Or Honor?

On Dasday, exactly four weeks after the quake, Silivera strapped Dafire to jhes back, gathered up their few belongings, and walked to where government center had stood. Jhe picked a desert aloene which had struggled up from a crack, maybe from what had been someone's garden, and tossed it down. A wildflower, like Khedderide itself, sprung from desert and dust and a bit of magic. And just as quick to die, thought Silivera.

Jhe stared down at the spot of color on the dusty grey rocks. Jhe wondered, if Ricel had lived, would they would have stayed and worked for Khedderide's rebirth? Or would they would have fled, as so many already had? Jhe watched the silent flower for a while. Not even a body to bury. The rocks had taken care of that.

Silivera turned and, still with some misgivings walked to the Records tent. Jhe requested a new certificate, for Dafire Aubochon. With one extra copy to carry. Then jhe headed south. Back to the lands of black-clad formality, green fields and old cities. To where the shame would be greater, but the chance of exposure less.

Jhe would go to jhes parents for a while, until jhe chose somewhere else, as jhe had chosen Khedderide. Jhe would not tell them Dafire's true lineage; even Dafire must never know jhe was father, not mother. Somewhere on the long journey south, between the steady pace of walking and the intimacy of fending for just the two of them, Silivera found peace, and the conviction jhe had chosen rightly. Together, a mother and jhes child, they arrived at Aubochon.

Nonar answered the door.

"Hello, mother," Silivera said.

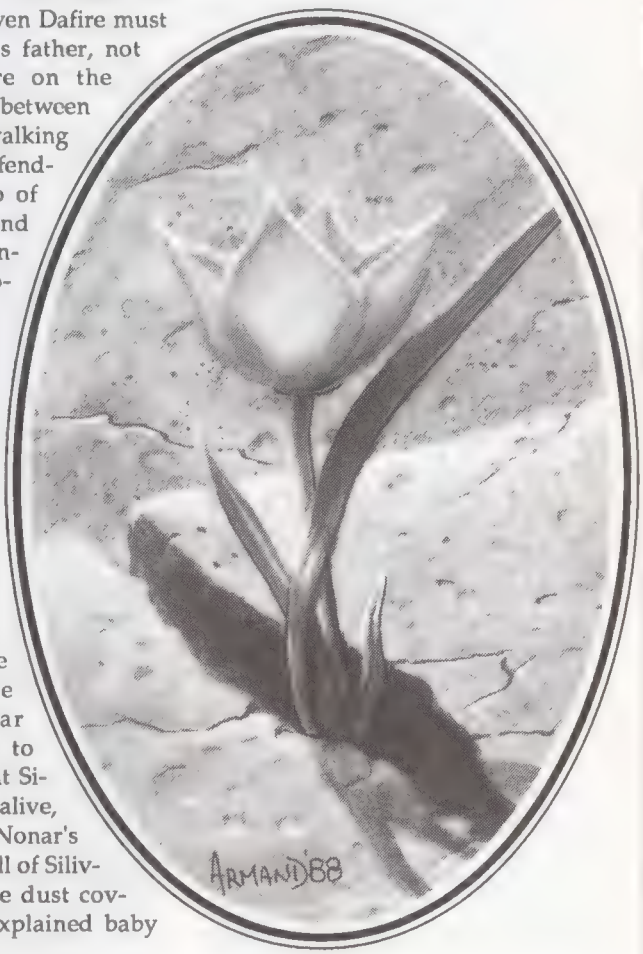
Tears sprang to Nonar's eyes, tears that pride held, unshed, at the corners. Silivera knew these unshed tears were the closest Nonar would ever come to showing jhes joy that Silivera had returned alive, from Khedderide. Nonar's gaze travelled over all of Silivera's figure, over the dust covered robes, the unexplained baby on the hip. Jhes eyes flickered, saying that somethingswould have to be discussed soon.

"So. You still wear the black. I'm glad to see you're not so lost to Honor that you've adopted northern ways."

I've fallen much farther than that, Silivera thought.

"No," jhe replied simply.

❧ *Pat Cirone*



The Djinn Bottle

by Deborah Millitello

Adossa sat on a wooden stool, kneading a lump of clay in the cool of morning, when she noticed five strangers riding along the river bank toward her thatched hut. With her forearm she smoothed a few grey strands back to a topknot and shaded her cave-black eyes from the river's glare. Few people from the city ventured this far upstream, especially in the summer heat, unless they were seeking her. She wiped her hands on her roughly woven dress. Thinking of enough gold to buy wheat for winter, she watched the riders approach.

One of the strangers wore a scarlet coat over a white robe, a shining scimitar thrust beneath the red-gold sash. A ruby brooch fixed a feather to the scarlet turban. His skin was like fired clay; he held his black beard high. He was lean and well-disciplined and his ebony eyes darted everywhere.

Handsome, Adossa thought as her eyes followed the lines of his face and body. *Handsome but dangerous.*

Reining his black stallion, he looked down at her. "I am Elrahad, Tarkhan of Beshtakeen."

"My lord." Adossa bowed just enough to be respectful, watching him as one watches a dangerous animal. "And why does the Tarkhan of Beshtakeen seek out this humble potter?"

He smiled with a cordiality that Adossa knew was feigned. "I have heard that no other potter in the land is your equal."

"You honor me, O Tarkhan." She glanced at the other four riders in white and gold uniforms, then at Elrahad with apprehension.

"A few of my guards," he said in a nonchalant tone, dismissing their presence. "I want you to make a

bottle."

"A bottle?"

"Yes. Make it exactly as I wish and I will give you one hundred gold pieces."

A gleam in her eyes, Adossa smiled and bowed. "What kind of bottle do you wish?"

"A bottle to hold a djinn."

He answered in such a matter-of-fact tone that Adossa repeated the words to herself to be certain she'd heard him correctly. "My lord, you ask the impossible. No earthly container can hold a spirit."

"Yours can." Elrahad sounded certain. "Otherwise, I would not have come."

Adossa straightened and shook her head. "My lord, you have been misled. I am but a potter, and though I know the secrets of clay, I have no skills in magical arts. No human can trap a djinn."

The Tarkhan leaned forward and smiled slyly. "The Emir of Abustan showed me the magic bottle you made for him. Make one for me."

Adossa started. "The Emir... showed you his bottle?"

Elrahad's smile broadened.

Feeling cornered, she studied him slowly with narrowed eyes. "So...you wish to trap a djinn. What color and for what purpose?"

Elrahad sat erect and stared down at her. "The purpose and color are not important."

"But they are. Each color of djinn has unique powers and protections. I must use the right clay and glazes for each. If you try to capture a blue djinn in a bottle made for a red djinn, he will merely laugh at you and crush you beneath his feet. So," she stared back at him with audacity, "if I am to make the correct type of bottle, tell me what I ask. Why do you wish to trap a djinn?"

Elrahad remained silent.

"I must know in order to speak the proper spells," Adossa said with restraint, "or the djinn will not be able to use his powers from within the bottle."

"To become Sultan of all Talukistan." He spoke as if to justify his motives. "The old Sultan is weak; his son is a half-wit. The Sultan's grand Vizier is as old and muddled as the Sultan himself. When he dies, the realm will be thrown into chaos. War, hunger, death-- Talukistan will suffer unless a strong leader takes control. *I* want to be that leader and I need the djinn to help me."

Adossa's voice had a hint of sarcasm. "A noble cause, but it could be the end of you."

"Not if your spell is correct."

Knowing she couldn't dissuade him, she sighed. "And what color?"

The man scowled at her then answered slowly. "A red djinn."

Adossa's eyes widened. "The *marid*, elemental spirit of fire! All the *marid* are deceitful and dangerous!"

Elrahad nodded. "Dangerous but powerful."

Glancing at the guards again, the woman stepped back nervously. "My lord, I cannot do as you ask! *Marid* are too powerful!"

"*Two* hundred gold pieces. Enough to buy some goats, wheat and oil for several years, bolts of fine cloth, and even a few precious oranges."

Adossa swallowed hard. As much as she wanted the money, she shook her head. "I dare not! Not even for two hundred gold!"

The Tarkhan's jaw tensed and his eyes burned. "Do you wish your son to live?"

She gasped. "Shamal? You have my son?"

"Yes, and his wife and children." He paused while the potter considered his words. "Make the bottle and I'll return your family *and* give you the gold."

Adossa's rage blazed like her kiln but her voice remained quiet. "You will have your bottle, Tarkhan."

"How soon?" Elrahad toyed with the hilt of his scimitar. "The Sultan might die any day."

Adossa pounded the clay on her board. "One week."

"In one week I will return." Turning his mount, Elrahad spoke softly to one of the guards, then spurred his horse to a canter.

Adossa watched three Tarkhan guards disappear downstream. The fourth guard dismounted and remained, his onyx eyes on her.

* * *

For a week Adossa worked hard, shaping the clay, letting it dry, and worrying about her son. She ground the colored rocks, mixed the glazes, and thought about her daughter-in-law. She fed the fire in her kiln until the stones glowed like sunset and she prayed for her grandchildren. On the seventh day she brushed away the cold ashes and stones and took out her creation.

Elrahad arrived the next day with the three guards. He looked down at her with amused confidence, then dismounted. "Where is the bottle?"

"Here!" The potter handed him a cloth-wrapped bundle.

Elrahad removed the covering, then gasped.

The bottle was a foot tall with curving handles on either side and a tight-fitting stopper. The glaze sparkled with the fiery depth of a ruby. On one side of the bottle was a five-pointed star inscribed in a golden circle.

"Beautiful," Elrahad whispered as his fingers caressed the bottle.

"Yes, it is," the potter said with quiet pride.

"Now, how do I trap the *marid*"

"Take this honeycomb," Adossa said and handed him a covered crock. "Press out the honey. Melt the wax. Dip the stopper in the wax and say these exact words:

"'Come, O Marid, spirit of flame! By the power of fire, I summon thee! By the power of earth, I hold thee! By the power of wind, I bind thee! By the power of water, I command thee!'

"The djinn will be enslaved to you by the spell. Now, O mighty Tarkhan, where are my son and his family?"

"They will remain my guests, until I have my djinn." He tossed

DJINN BOTTLE

her a large pouch. "Here is your payment. You are truly a great potter."

Adossa glared at him but said nothing.

After rewrapping it, Elrahad placed the bottle and the covered crock in a sack which he tied behind his saddle. He mounted his stallion and gazed down at Adossa with satisfaction. Turning, he rode south to his palace, the four guards following him.

Feeling the weight of gold in her hands, Adossa watched them, anger in her eyes but a hint of a smile on her lips.

* * *

Adossa was digging clay just after sunrise the next day when a hot wind roared up the river valley from the south. She cowered face down in the mud, shielding her head with her arms.

A booming voice shook the ground and shattered trees. "Hail, Adossa!"

Peeking over her sleeve, Adossa spotted a figure *ten* times as tall as her hut. His skin was red; his eyes were like black opals. Sharp teeth gleamed like daggers of pearl. In his right hand he held a human-sized figure trapped in a golden cage.

Sitting up, Adossa smiled and bowed respectfully. "Hail, O mighty Zah-Rin!"

"It is good to see you again, mistress of clay," the *marid* said. His voice stirred great waves in the river, and shook Adossa's hut. "I thank you for the Tarkhan. Surprised he was that I did not climb into the bottle. He became quite furious and demanded I make him Sultan. Nearly to tears I laughed myself at the way he chanted the spell!

"Safe is your family; tomorrow they will be home." Zah-Rin poked the cage and grinned. "My new pet will amuse me for many years. For this Adossa, one wish I grant you."

The potter smiled. "I have all that I need, and now..."She glanced with satisfaction at the miserable figure in the cage. "I have the only thing I could want."

The djinn guffawed, flattening Adossa's house and every tree for a two-mile radius. "I like you, potter!" He grinned wickedly and slapped his thigh. With a wave of his hand, he restored the hut and raised up new trees along the river bank.

Elrahad cried, "But the Emir of Abustan!" His knuckles whitened as they clutched the golden bars. "I saw the bottle! I *saw* the djinn!"

"Of course, you fool," Adossa said without pity. "He was bound by his own kind. Zah-Rin asked me to make that bottle so the Emir could control the djinn during his imprisonment. I *told* you, no human can trap a djinn."

Carefully, Zah-Rin placed the crimson bottle beside her. "May you live a long and happy life, mistress of clay!" The *marid* winked, then disappeared, his laughter mingling with Elrahad's wail.

Standing, Adossa picked up the djinn bottle and walked to her hut. She set it on a shelf - beside four similar ones she'd been compelled to make over the years.

Deborah Millitello

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GUEST EDITORIAL

High fantasy!

WHERE THE MYTH AND THE ARCHETYPE PLAY

by Julian May

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Stories about perilous quests for an all-powerful talisman. About a pathetic, despised wight who turns out to be heir to the throne. About devouring monsters and faceless fiends who get their just comeuppance. Stories about dwarfs and giants and winged dragons, about the Land of the Elves, about black magic and white, witches and wizards, and heroes of both sexes who meet fantastic challenges and overcome them...

It's the stuff we love. I write it, and you who are perusing this magazine read it. Perhaps you even prefer it to all other types of literary entertainment; and if you do, you have plenty of company. Worldwide, fantastic literature (and I lump fantasy and SF in the same imaginative category, just as booksellers do, having no compunctions because my own work partakes of both aspects of the genre) outsells mystery, romance, western, horror, and war stories by a large margin.

What I write, and what millions read, are fairytales for grownups. My stories may be more complex and sophisticated than the hearthside fantasies collected by the Brothers Grimm, but they share the same themes and the same *raison d'etre*. The great popularity of modern fantasy among literate adults has not escaped the notice of psychologists and literary scholars, either. Many a book, learned thesis, or monograph has attempted to link a predilection for fantasy with the compulsion to escape from the anxieties of the modern age, with its threats of nuclear winter, vanishing ozone, poisoned oceans, radioactive contamination, ruined forests, overpopulation, famine, AIDS, crime, drug addiction, sex and race discrimination, political bankruptcy, and galloping job obsolescence.

It's true that reading fantasies is a good way to put all that aside for a few hours. (Unless one is fond of the gloomy dystopias that were all the rage back in the 1970's.) But one can escape from the mundane grind by reading *anything*. The academic may counter with, "Aha! But life in the 80's, with its stress and hypertechnicfication causes some sensitive souls to react--to regress to a romantic world where magic or futuristic gadgetry solve all problems." And there's some truth in that. Anybody who has ever labored to master a brand-new computer can empathize with St. George the Dragon-Slayer, and a person with a job that is highly competitive or emotionally taxing can feel for poor Frodo as he pursues his dangerous and none-too-clear quest... But I don't think we can be certain that our modern-age perils are *subjectively* more anxiety-provoking than--say--those of the half-starved 19th-century sweatshop seamstress, or the medieval plowman subject to the whims of the lord of the manor, or even the Ice-Age family whose cave home is damp, cold, and perpetually under siege by hungry hyenas coveting the leftovers. Life has been tough all over, for a very long time.

About as long as people have loved fantastic stories.

Well, if we're not escaping and we're not compensating, why *do* we enjoy reading and writing the stuff so much?

The most persuasive of the theoretical psychologists maintain that fantasies--especially those with an elaborate imaginary universe, populated by vividly drawn characters engaged in heroic adventures--fulfill a deep human psychic need. All people, primitive as well as hi-tech, grow up with unresolved emotional conflicts and inner dilemmas *that can apparently be "healed" through the contemplation of certain fantasies.* The great child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, in his prize-winning study, *The Uses of Enchantment*, analyzes a number of traditional fantasies and points out "the manifold truths revealed by fairytales, which can guide our lives; [truths] as valid today as [they were] once upon a time".

* * *

Long ago, both children and adults got their fantasy-fix from listening to tribal

myths and traditional campfire tales. Then came the age of heroic epics and sagas, the Homeric poems and those of the Mesopotamians, Persians, and Sanskrit-speakers; later in Europe, certain famous fantasies were written down: *Beowulf*, the *Nibelungenlied*, the Icelandic sagas, the ancient Irish tales, France's *Chansons de Geste*, the Welsh *Mabinogion*, and the British tales of *King Arthur, Sir Gawain*, and their ilk. Last of all have come the creative tellers of fantastic tales--people such as Mary Shelley, Lewis Carroll, Bram Stoker, Beatrix Potter, and L. Frank Baum--not to mention yours truly and the thousands of other contemporary writers whose stories can also be included under the broad umbrella labelled "fantasy".

All fantasy has common elements that account for its perennial appeal. The characters and plots are somehow symbolic of our own psychological defects or personal problems, and as we read them we are amazed (have our attention caught), we wonder (the story sticks in our mind, willy-nilly), and we are subliminally comforted and made wiser--even when the tale itself is laden with horrors, as is *Frankenstein*, or ends in tragedy, as does *Le Morte d'Arthur*. This seems paradoxical to the fantasy-as-escapism devotees, and even perverse to certain psychologists of the old school, who would have characterized fantasy enthusiasts as mentally unhealthy, fleeing from a reality they might more profitably have faced.

" All fantasy has common elements that account for its perennial appeal. The characters and plots are somehow symbolic..."

Fortunately for the self-esteem of writers like me and readers like you, the psychological wheel has turned. We are now quite respectable (well, *most* of us...), thanks to the *Theory of Archetypes*.

Originally, an archetype was a pattern or a model. The term was adopted by the Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung and applied to his theory that all humans inherit certain ideas that control our perceptions of the world around us and ourselves.

Jung was a man who read widely and was fascinated by the parallels between psychic symbolism (especially as manifested in dreams) and certain universally recurrent themes of myth and fairytale. We find the same themes in modern fantasies: a hero (male or female) who must overcome adversity or conquer base human urges; a wise old person who sets the hero on the right path and later affirms his or her victory; a powerful demonic figure who attacks the hero with implacable fury; a kindly, sometimes inept, sidekick of the hero who nevertheless supplies practical support and a certain wisdom that the hero lacks; godlike inhuman beings who help or menace the hero; sexual temptors who try to lure the heroic protagonist away from the quest , into blissful slavery or destruction; elemental dangers such as dark caves, trackless wilderness, stormy seas, sheets of flame... And how many fantasies feature similar plots: the obligatory journey, the impossible quest, the villain to be conquered, the necessary sacrifice of selfishness, the coming to terms with one's limitations and the right use of one's talents--all motifs that recur again and again in ancient and modern fantasies.

All motifs that I've used myself.

Jung said that these symbols and mythologems which seem to be universal in folklore and modern fantasy are aspects of a "collective unconscious" shared by all humanity. We are not, Jung maintained, born with minds that are blank tablets. We inherit not only the genes to produce neurons and brains, but also ideas--the archetypes. One can compare these modes of thought to a series of peepholes, through which a person is obliged to look. We all react strongly to images such as the nurturing Great Mother and the all-powerful Sky Father; we know what a Trickster is and are awed and frightened by the pride and potency of Lucifer; we know which qualities are archetypically adult and which belong to the child, what characteristics are generally thought of as feminine and what others are called masculine; we know what constitutes a numinous experience--whether we call it religion, mysticism, or cosmic consciousness. These ideas, and many others, are universal to humanity and form a common mental bond between !Kung bushman and MIT physicist, Peruvian llamaherder and Canadian nurse, Japanese electronics technician and writer of fantasy.

Archetypes.

There are probably hundreds of them. Many are personified, manifest as gods and goddesses and the heroic adventures of mythology and epic saga. (In our collaborative fantasy novel *Black Trillium*, Andre

Norton, Marion Zimmer Bradley and I write about three princesses on a quest. One princess is an Athena archetype, one is Artemis, and the third is Hera. You'll have to wait for the book to discover which writer chose which archetype!) Archetypes can also be abstractions: the quest, the identity search, magical powers, immortality, and many other ideas that are the warp and woof of modern fantasy.

As late as ten years ago, Jung's Theory of Archetypes was scorned by the majority of American psychologists and literarary scholars. When I set out to write my Pliocene Quartet--*The Many-Colored Land, The Golden Torc, The Nonborn King* and *The Adversary*, I wished to utilize archetypes because they are splendid literary "hooks." (Put an archetype into your fantasy and it's a winner!) I had to buy Jung's works mostly in hard cover; at that time very few literary studies that utilized Jungian theory. All that changed, however, and now I have two shelves of lit-crit and psychological books that are homages to Jung. And I use them constantly to help work out plots and characters.

The archetypal elements in the Pliocene books are obvious, if you care to look for them. The principal protagonist, Aiken Drum, is a typical Trickster--a narcissist youth with a power complex who is afraid to grow up because he doesn't know who he is and what he will become. He falls in love with another archetypal character, Mercy Lamballe, who is the embodiment of the Devouring Female, the Belle Dame Sans Merci. (Strangely enough, this character is based upon an actual women I knew. She was quite frightening).

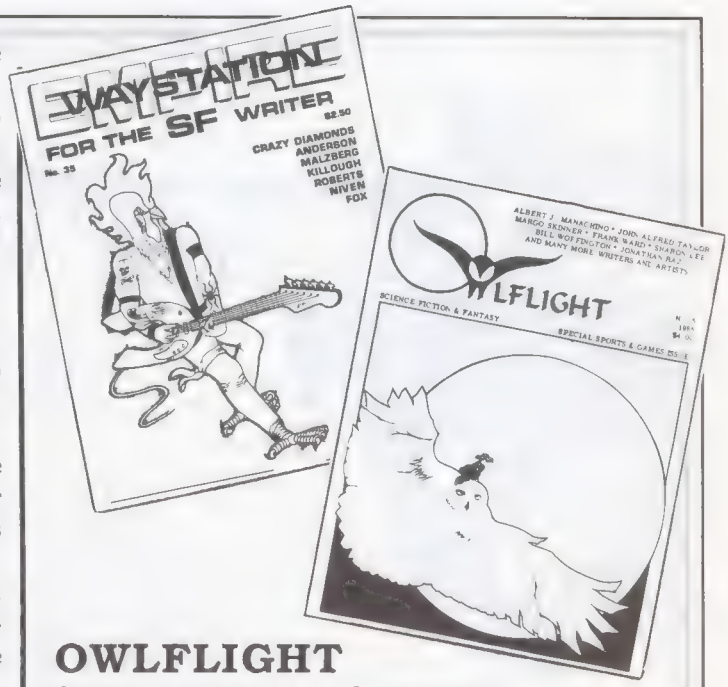
You can also find the proud Lucifer archetype in my books, and the Flying Dutchman, and the Ugly Duckling, and the Virgin Huntress, and the Wise Old Woman and Wise Old Man. You can find Apollo and Hephaistos and Hermes, quests galore, journeys, identity searches, psychic transformations, and Tempting Talismans. I incorporated elements from Celtic legends and from fairytales of most of the European countries, "explaining" them as ingeniously as I could in a pseudo-scientific manner so that the novels would fit my own definition of science-fiction—

Which is another name for fantasy.

But I do love them both; and after reading or writing fantasy I almost feel wiser and more...together. And so I conclude this Guest Editorial with a little poem that sums up my feelings about the deeper psychology of fantasy:

O give me a tale
Of the gods or the Grail
Where the myth and the archetype play;
Where the hero endures,
And the anima lures,
And success crowns the quest, come what may.

❧ *Julian May*



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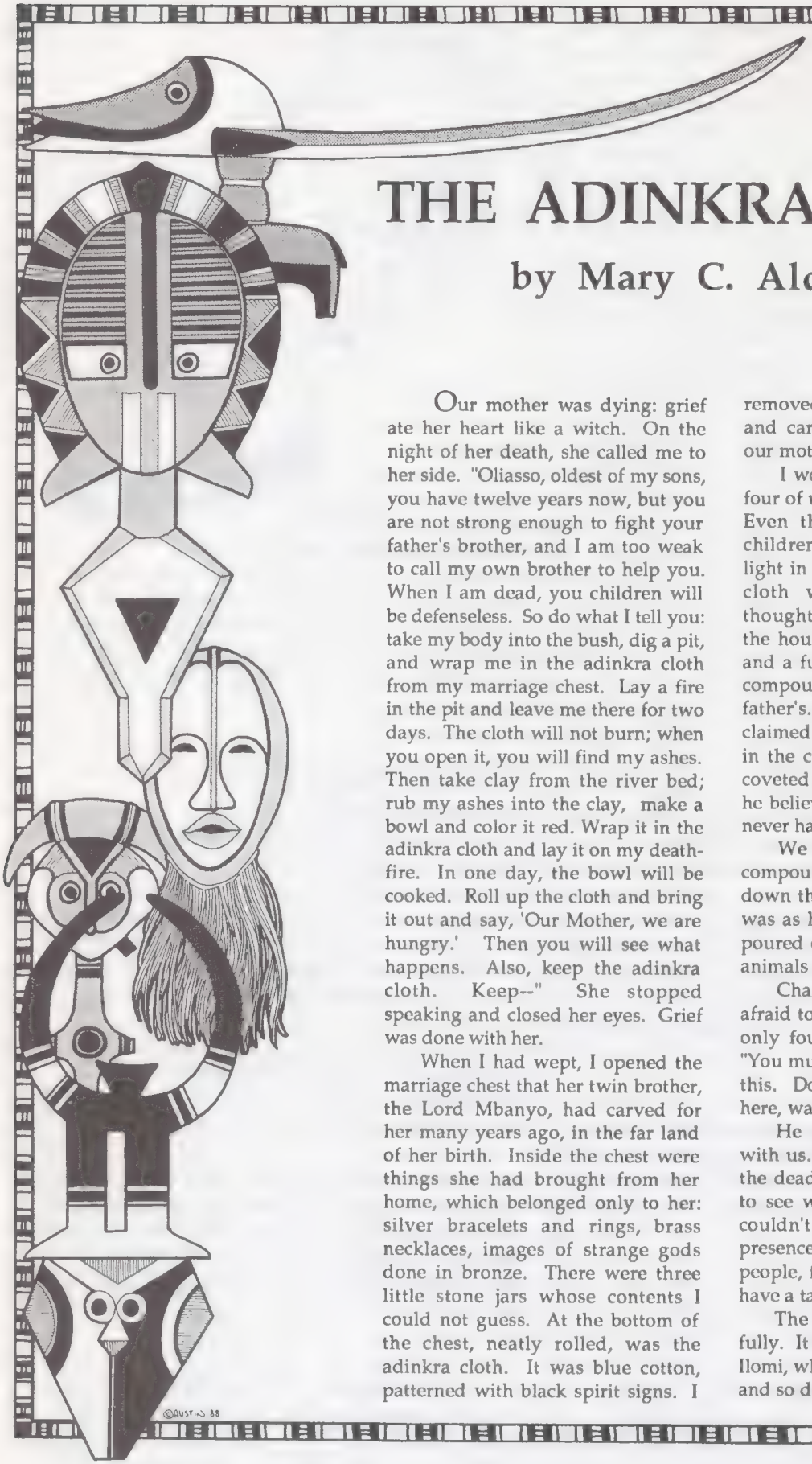


THE ADINKRA CLOTH

by Mary C. Aldridge

Our mother was dying: grief ate her heart like a witch. On the night of her death, she called me to her side. "Oliasso, oldest of my sons, you have twelve years now, but you are not strong enough to fight your father's brother, and I am too weak to call my own brother to help you. When I am dead, you children will be defenseless. So do what I tell you: take my body into the bush, dig a pit, and wrap me in the adinkra cloth from my marriage chest. Lay a fire in the pit and leave me there for two days. The cloth will not burn; when you open it, you will find my ashes. Then take clay from the river bed; rub my ashes into the clay, make a bowl and color it red. Wrap it in the adinkra cloth and lay it on my death-fire. In one day, the bowl will be cooked. Roll up the cloth and bring it out and say, 'Our Mother, we are hungry.' Then you will see what happens. Also, keep the adinkra cloth. Keep--" She stopped speaking and closed her eyes. Grief was done with her.

When I had wept, I opened the marriage chest that her twin brother, the Lord Mbanyo, had carved for her many years ago, in the far land of her birth. Inside the chest were things she had brought from her home, which belonged only to her: silver bracelets and rings, brass necklaces, images of strange gods done in bronze. There were three little stone jars whose contents I could not guess. At the bottom of the chest, neatly rolled, was the adinkra cloth. It was blue cotton, patterned with black spirit signs. I removed it, brought it to the bed, and carefully wrapped it around our mother.

I woke my little brothers. The four of us bent our backs to lift her. Even though we were but four children, our mother's body was light in our arms, as if the adinkra cloth were filled with gentle thoughts. We carried her out of the house. It was the dry season, and a full moon shone on the still compound that once had been our father's. Now his younger brother claimed all the goods and people in the compound. Most of all he coveted our mother for the magic he believed she had; but he would never have her now.

We crept in silence out the compound gate and made our way down the village street. The night was as hushed as if the moon had poured out a sleeping potion over animals and people.

Chami, the youngest of us, was afraid to go into the bush. He was only four years old. I told him, "You must come, our mother asked this. Don't you think her spirit is here, watching you?"

He dried his tears and came with us. The woods whispered as the dead who could not rest came to see what we were doing. We couldn't see them, but I felt their presence. I said, "Forgive us, dead people, for entering your home. I have a task to do for my mother."

The dead withdrew respectfully. It was not so bad after that. Ilomi, who was ten, carried a spade, and so did Kiwaso, who was seven.

We dug the pit, not very deep, and I laid the fire in it. When the fire died, we lifted our mother's body in the adinkra cloth; again it was very light. We placed her on the coals.

Chami and Kiwaso began to cry. Ilomi and I comforted them; then we went home.

For two days, we left our mother in the pit. It was only the next morning after we put her there, when Uncle came to the house. I stopped him in the yard. I bowed. "Our mother is no better; she can't see you."

Our uncle was a tall, strong man. When he was angry, he looked fierce. "Tell her she must see me. I am her husband now. Tell her."

I went into the house and came out again. "Our mother has blood. She says you must go away."

Uncle looked disgusted. He hated such things and sent his own wives away when their bleeding came. "Tell her I will be back. I will be back as her husband."

When the two days were over, we went by night to the bush. We opened the cloth. It was not burnt. Inside were white ashes. I closed the cloth, and we went to the river, waded into the cool water, and dug clay. I sat on the bank and sprinkled the ashes into the clay, then worked the clay into a bowl.

Chami, squatting beside me, asked, "Why are you putting Mama in a bowl?"

"Sh," said Ilomi.

I painted the bowl red with seed dyes and wrapped it in the adinkra cloth. We went back into the bush and placed the bowl in the death-fire, which was still glowing.

The next day, my father's first wife came to our house. She was one of the brides his father had chosen. She was brown, like all my father's people. Only our mother was black. She said, "Tell my sister I have come. She must not continue to refuse our husband's brother. She is no better than the rest of us. I will speak with her."

I went in and came out. "My mother says she dreamed last night of a jar that would not open." The first wife retreated a step, for she was pregnant with our father's last child. I hardly had to say, "Mother does not dare speak with you until the dream's influence is gone," for our father's first wife was already hurrying down the path to her own house.

I went inside. The little ones were eating my meal-cakes, which had big dry lumps of raw meal in them. The other wives hadn't asked us to share with them after our father died and our mother became sick.

Ilomi said, "Oliasso, what will they do when they know our mother is dead?"

"And not here," added Kiwas so, putting down his cake. He gave it a sorrowful look.

I knew pretty well what Uncle would do, but I shrugged as if it didn't matter. I sat down and took a cake. It was heavier than the ones our mother made. Only Chami was still eating, spreading his cakes with honey. I bit into the cake. Its crust was hard as coconut rind.

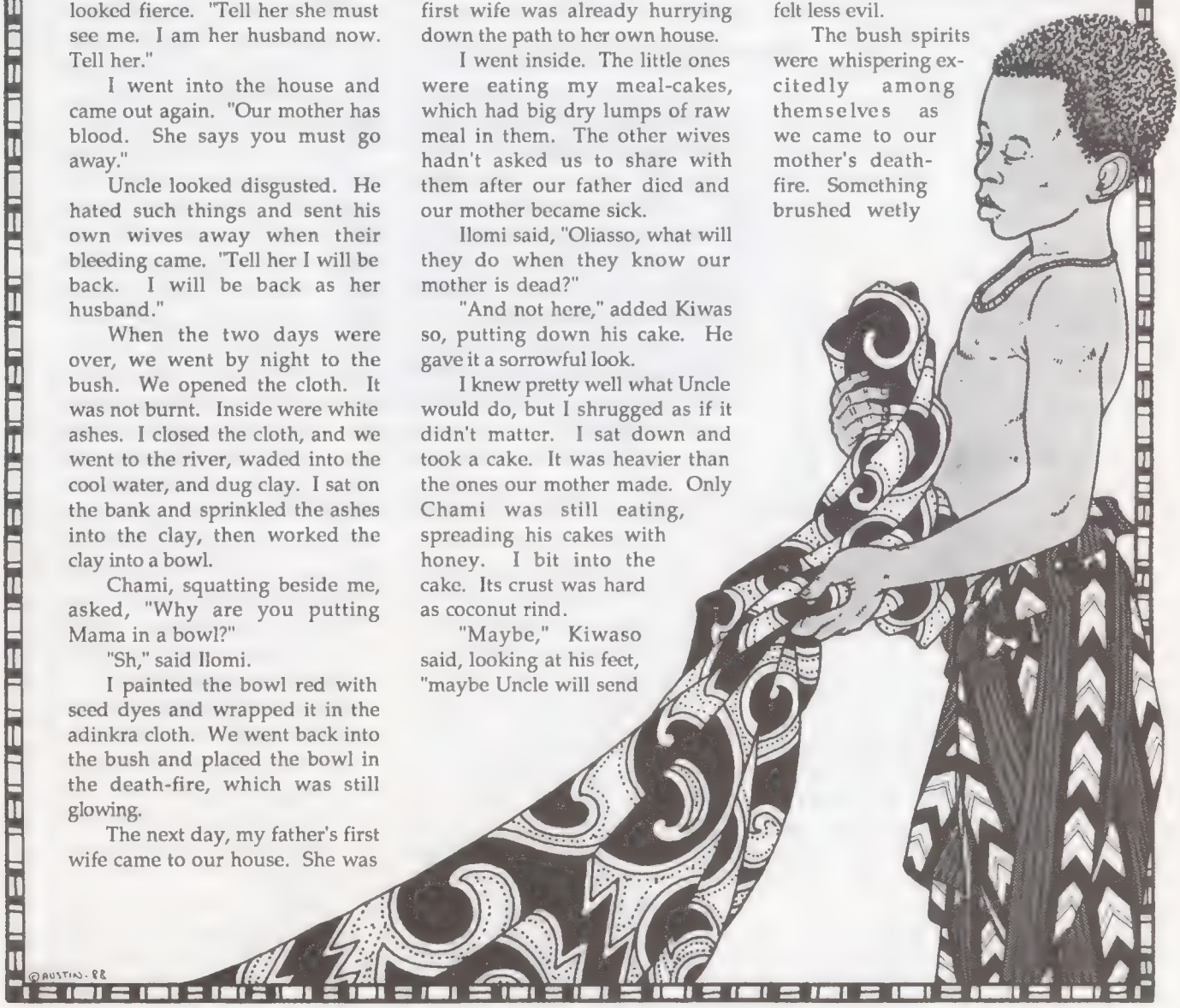
"Maybe," Kiwaso said, looking at his feet, "maybe Uncle will send a leopard after you."

Ilomi and I hissed together, "Never say that!" and Kiwaso looked frightened. Everyone except Chami stopped eating altogether.

We knew who the leopard was, who had killed our father.

That night, we left the village again and went to get the bowl. The night was inky, with clouds covering the sky. I felt spirits wandering unhappily and wished the other three boys could stay home. Surely something was going to happen. But mother would have expected us to do it together. I only wished the night felt less evil.

The bush spirits were whispering excitedly among themselves as we came to our mother's death-fire. Something brushed wetly



Adinkra Cloth

against my cheek, and I jumped. It was only a leaf.

By the death-fire's glow, we unwrapped the adinkra cloth. The bowl was firm, and though it had been on the fire, it was cool enough to touch. I gave it to Ilomi to hold while I rolled up the adinkra cloth.

"I want to hold Mama," said Chami.

"You'll drop it," Ilomi said.

"No, I won't. Oliasso, please?"

"Yes, let him hold the bowl." I stuffed the adinkra cloth down my tunic and knotted my waist belt so it wouldn't fall. Chami giggled, dropped the bowl down his front, and tied his belt, too. He looked pregnant.

"Stop playing," Ilomi scolded.

Kiwaso said softly, "Oh, Oliasso, look!"

He pointed.

Off through the trees, something was moving. Something black as the night around us. It came toward us, slinking through the brush; two green eyes pointed our way.

"A leopard!"

The same fearful thought held all of us rooted to the ground.

The leopard came into the clearing where the death-fire was. It was a big leopard, not spotted, but black from the tips of its ears to the tip of its tail. We could not move from fright. It circled us once, and I thought I felt its hot breath. Its green eyes glittered. It looked from me to Ilomi, from Ilomi to Kiwaso to Chami. Its tail switched. It began to stalk Chami, whose legs bent from fright. He sank to his knees and covered his face as the leopard came closer.

The leopard stopped. It gave a puzzled yowl and backed away.

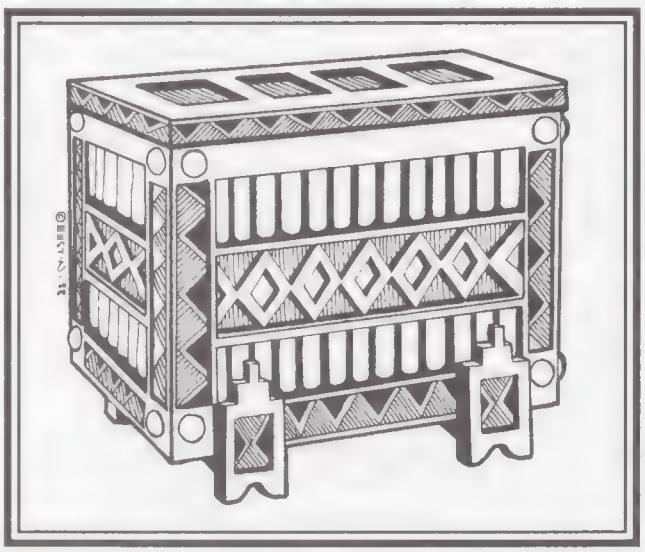
Ilomi and I ran to Chami. I picked him up. The bowl in his tunic bumped against my chest. The leopard started to approach us again, then backed away very quickly and whimpered.

Ilomi grabbed Kiwaso's hand. We ran out of the clearing, back through the bush, all the way to the village and never looked back.

When we got home, I hid the cloth and bowl at the bottom of Mother's marriage chest, for my uncle had no claim on that.

Uncle came to us in the morning. He stormed up to the house, shoving me aside so I fell. I got up and followed him in as my three brothers quietly slipped out.

"Where is your mother?" he demanded, looking bigger than ever in our little house.



"Dead."

"Dead!" He seized the front of my tunic. A wild green light came into his eyes. "Where is her body?"

"I burned it in the bush!"

"Where? Show me!"

He dragged me out to the bush where the death-pit was, but it seemed to me he already knew the way. He looked at the empty, dead pit. He looked at me. "Where is the body?"

I looked away from his furious eyes. "Perhaps a leopard ate it."

He broke a switch off a thorny *jitaio* tree and began to beat me, saying, "Where is she? Where has she gone? Did she go back to that brother of hers? Tell me where she went!"

After a while we returned to the village. Uncle stood out in the street and complained loudly to the other men. "My foreign wife has run away! This boy claims she died, but there's no body!"

They all began to scold, demanding I tell them where my mother had gone. I kept repeating that she was dead and I had burned her up.

"She's run away," one of the old men said finally in disgust. "That's what comes of marrying foreigners. Your brother was ill-advised!"

"She's my wife now! I want her back!"

"But she's only trouble," the other men protested. "What do you want her for? You have her children, four fine boys. You have her pots, cloths, brass and silver bracelets. Take them and give them to your other wives, who are more deserving. And she was a hard worker, at least. Her granaries are full. Give that to your wives as well, and forget her!"

"I want her," Uncle said. "The young men must go to her land, to her brother Mbanyo and bring her back."

"Oh, no!" the leader of the young men spoke up at once. "That's a great journey, and who knows what'll happen in a foreign land? Suppose we go all that way and Lord Mbanyo won't release her? Very likely she'll tell him a lot of lies about how badly she was treated here. They are twins; he'll believe anything she says. Who can win against a great lord in his own country? Besides, we have our own farms to think of."

"Yes, the land must be cleared!"

"Forget the woman," the other men urged.

Uncle's fists clenched; his face shook with anger. "And who is to feed her children? Why should my other wives work to fill their greedy mouths?"

"Someone has to feed children," the old men said. "Your dead brother's sons are your sons."

Now I clenched my fists. Never, never, never!

The old men said, "This is enough," and everybody walked away to go about their business. My uncle waited until they were all gone, then he grabbed my shoulder and dug in his fingers like iron talons.

"You know where she is," he hissed. "You'll pay!" He started dragging me to our mother's house in the compound. The bite of his fingers on my shoulder brought stinging tears to my eyes, and I had to grit my teeth to keep from crying. When we came to the house, he threw me inside and glared at all four of us.

"Does she think she can escape me? You are my sons, now, and I shall use you as I please. And she will know. The witch will know, I'm sure. When she sees how I use you, your mother will come back and then she will do as I say!"

"But she--" began Chami.

Ilomi pinched him.

"She'll come," my uncle whispered. His face twisted with anger like a fearsome mask. "I will have the woman and her magic! My brother knew nothing." He sneered at us. I hid my fists behind my back. "He could have made you little princes. Far greater even than your uncle, the Lord Mbanyo, in your mother's country. When I have her magic, I can do that for you! Would you like to be princes and ride on fine steeds and wear gold, copper and coral?"

"I would," Chami said breathlessly. "When?"

"When your mother comes back."

Chami laughed. "But she is--"

Ilomi slapped him. Chami rocked backwards with astonishment, and tears rushed from his eyes. He wailed, "Oliasso!"

I jumped up. "Shame on you, Ilomi, picking on the little one!"

"Yes, shame!" cried Kiwaso, meaning it. "Mama said to take care of our brother!"

Kiwaso and I continued to yell at Ilomi until our uncle got angry and shouted at us all to be quiet. But Chami wept and wouldn't talk to him anymore.

Uncle said, "Tomorrow you can all go out to the fields. The land must be cleared and broken for planting."

Ilomi looked astonished. "But that's men's work! We aren't strong enough to do that!"

"Do it or be beaten."

The next day we went to the fields. Uncle told each of us what to do. It was a grown man's work. The other men in the family muttered among themselves. Nobody dared speak up.

" She'll come," my uncle whispered. His face twisted with anger like a fearsome mask. "I will have the woman and her magic!"

Years ago our uncle had gone to the city to study with the magic men there. Now whenever something disturbing happened, people suspected him.

We had to clear the dry brush and chop up the land. It had been baking long months in the sun, hard work even for men. Ilomi and Kiwaso and I went first to work on Chami's part. My uncle watched us. By the day's end, we were able to finish Chami's work and part of Kiwaso's. Our uncle beat Ilomi and me. Then he turned to Kiwaso, who was trembling.

"Do you want this to happen to you? Tell your brothers to pray for your mother's return!"

"She's dead," Kiwaso whispered.

He beat Kiwaso. We all started toward our house. When we got there, he told us; "No. That's not your house anymore. From now on, you live in the goat shed."

I said; "I'll take our mother's marriage chest, then. *That* belongs to us."

"Nothing belongs to you!"

Father's youngest brother overhearing, spoke up; "That was their mother's; it was Lord Mbanyo gift. It belongs to his sister's sons, now." Wild green light jumped in Uncle's eyes. Our other uncle stepped back quickly, but said, "Would *you* claim a twin's gift?"

The other men began to mutter against breaking a twin bond.

Uncle said, "Take the chest, then, and nothing else!"

"They have to take some food!"

"Their mother can feed them," said Uncle, "or let them dig wild peanuts when they finish their work--which they did not do today! Go on, you boys! Get out of here!"

We went into the goat shed. At least it was clean. The door was made of sticks. I tied it shut. Alone we sat in the faint afternoon light that stole through the cracks.

"I'm hungry," Chami said. "I don't want to go and eat peanuts!"

"Hush." I was almost too tired and sore to be hungry. But of course, we must eat. There would be tomorrow. I went to the wall and peeked through a crack. Nobody was outside. I went back and sat down on the floor with my brothers and opened the marriage chest. The bowl was there, wrapped in the adinkra cloth. I unfolded the cloth and lifted out the bowl and set it on the ground.

Chami whispered, "What are you going to do?"

I ran my tongue over my dusty lips. "Our--." My voice broke from the dryness in my throat. I coughed and grasped the red bowl with both

Adinkra Cloth

hands. I said softly; "Our Mother, we are hungry."

A wonderful smell filled the goat shed. A rich stew of meat and vegetables, such as our mother used to make, appeared in the bowl.

"Oooh!" Chami and Kiwaso said together. Ilomi swallowed hard and said nothing.

We had to eat with our fingers, for we had no spoons. We ate and ate, yet there was food in the bowl. Only, when we had enough, the scraps disappeared. The bowl cleaned itself.

I picked up the adinkra cloth to rewrap the bowl. The cloth felt good in my hands, cool and soothing. I had a sudden thought, and pulled off my tunic. I laid the adinkra cloth across the welts on my back.

All at once they were eased, and in the same moment I felt a sense of our mother's presence, filling the shed with her love.

"Come," I said to Ilomi.

I wrapped first Ilomi, then Kiwaso in the adinkra cloth, and the cloth healed their wounds, too. Then Chami insisted on taking his turn, though he wasn't hurt. He smiled broadly when I laid the cloth over his shoulders.

"Mama's here," he said.

In the morning, before we went to the fields, we had a breakfast of delicious cakes with fruit and honey, and then the bowl cleaned itself and filled up again with fine, creamy beer. We drank our fill, and the bowl cleaned itself again. I wrapped it carefully in the adinkra cloth. Then I bowed to the cloth and bowl.

"Thank you, Our Mother."

It was a bad day in the fields, just as before. We did Chami's work first, then began on Kiwaso's. The sun was unforgiving. The dust flew in our faces, and our backs ached. When the sun was very high, Kiwaso fainted. Chami seized a gourdful of the men's water and poured it on our brother. At once Uncle struck him hard enough to knock him down.

"That does not belong to you!"

"But my brother is sick!" Chami was not very afraid of our uncle. But I was afraid when Uncle looked at him, silently, for a long time.

The next day, when we left the goat shed after our secret breakfast, Uncle was waiting for us by the compound gate. "You three go on. I'm taking Chami into the forest to hunt with me."

My throat closed with fear. I whispered, "I'll go with you."

"Yes. You would, to get out of your work! Go to the fields and make sure you finish what you have to do, unless you want another beating!"

"Now I see. She isn't dead, you little liar. She put some of her blood in here, so you could call her."...

"What are we going to hunt?" asked Chami, but Uncle did not answer him.

"Go on to the fields," I told Ilomi and Kiwaso as Uncle walked way with Chami.

I went back into the shed and opened the marriage chest. I gathered up the adinkra cloth. "Our Mother," I whispered, "I am afraid. I think our father's brother means evil to Chami."

My mother's presence touched me. I stuffed the cloth down the front of my tunic and tied my belt at the waist so it wouldn't slip out. I left the shed and ran after my uncle and Chami.

It was dark and quiet in the bush. I could see no sign of where my uncle had passed. I stood silent, listening to my heart hammer. Where were they, and what would he do to Chami? "O dead people who own the forest, have you seen a tall man and a little boy?"

"We saw a little boy pass," whispered a voice like wind tickling stiff leaves. "And one with him, but whether man or beast we do not know."

"A standing beast or a man with a tail," another voice sighed.

"With green eyes like a fire."

"Which way?" I asked. The underbrush ahead of me bent to one side.

"Thank you." I whispered and followed the path. I walked quickly, into the stillness and the deep darkness. Then I heard a soft hopeless whimpering and ran to it.

Chami crouched by a huge old tree. Around and around him, slowly, in an ever-closing circle, stalked a great black leopard.

Suddenly, its tail switched and the beast changed shape. Uncle stood over Chami, smiling with teeth that for a second were too long. "Weep, nephew," he said softly. Skin crawled on my spine. "Your mother will come when she hears you crying."

Chami moaned. Uncle again became a leopard, circling closer, closer.

I pulled the adinkra cloth out of my tunic and crept forward. I prayed the beast would not smell me. It put out a great hooked paw to touch Chami's face.

Chami screamed.

I jumped forward and flung the adinkra cloth over the leopard's head. The beast screamed louder than Chami. It began to struggle and claw at the cloth.

I snatched up Chami. His arms went around my neck tighter than a baby monkey. I started to run, then stopped. The cloth!

The leopard was still fighting it. The cloth whipped around the beast's head as if lashed by a wind, though the air was still.

Suddenly the beast became a man. He struggled with the cloth, tore it from his head, sat up, and looked at us. His face was scratched and bleeding from clawing at the adinkra cloth. His eyes shone green.

"Curse you," he said softly. "How far away is she? Too far to hear the child cry out?" He stood and threw the torn adinkra cloth aside. "Perhaps she doesn't believe I'll harm him," he said, coming toward us. I backed away, but he seized my arm. His breath in my face was warm and rank. "I *will* have her. Come; we will go home."

I set Chami on the ground.

"Run and pick up that old cloth of our mother's." I told him casually.

He brought me the adinkra cloth, and we walked back to the village with Uncle. Anger and greed made him steam like a running beast. When we reached the compound, he shoved Chami aside and gripped my shoulder again. "Now," he said, "you and I will bring her here."

"She's dead."

"Dead or alive, I'll have her!"

He pulled me into the shed leaving Chami outside. He left the door open for light.

"There's only one thing of hers that I don't have, and that is her marriage chest. So."

"That belongs to us!"

"And you belong to me," he said with a smile. He pulled the chest out of the corner and sat on the floor. My fists knotted. I felt my own weakness. He opened the chest. The red bowl was on top; he tossed it aside. "She never could make decent pottery." He lifted out one of the little stone jars. "What magic did she do with this, I wonder?"

"You have no right to touch those things. They are family things of my mother's."

If I were a man, I could seize the chest, I could strike him—but even in my thoughts, I faltered at striking my father's brother. In spite of all, he was head of the family.

He opened the jar and shook some of its contents into his hand. Even in the dimness I saw the red glow of a coppery dust.

"Aha! Copper for magic!" he said. He dipped a finger in the gleaming dust and stroked his forehead, cheeks and lips with the copper. He sucked in his breath. "Yes! I feel it—power, hot as wine!" He unstoppered another jar and poured out a white powder.

"Bone," he gloated. "Old bones from some magician's tomb, no doubt, to strengthen the copper's magic!" He streaked the powdered bone on his face beside the smears of copper. He laughed softly... "She should have taken this with her. She—" He looked at me again. "Is she really dead?"

I nodded.

"Not much of a witch, if she couldn't even stop her own sickness."

I put my clenched hands behind my back. "Mother died of grief after the leopard killed our father. Magic is too dangerous to use."

"Dangerous to fools, yes." He took out the third jar. "And what, I wonder, is this?" He smiled at the little jar. "Could it be blood, I wonder? Yes." He shook it. "Now I see. She isn't dead, you little liar. She put some of her blood in here, so you could call her." His eyes narrowed, then. "And I think *you* will call her, Oliasso. I don't trust that woman."

"I *tell* you, our mother is dead!"

He caught my arm and jerked me close to him, forcing me to kneel between his thighs. With one strong hand holding my right arm twisted up behind me, he smeared copper and bone on my face. Then he opened the third jar and shook the contents into his palm.

It was a powder, dark brown: dried blood.

He laughed again. "How good of her to leave all this behind! You will call her now, boy."

I shuddered. Why would our mother leave blood behind when she had left us the bowl and the adinkra cloth? I shook my head. "I won't."

He hurt my arm. I cried out,

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"Stop hurting Oliasso!"

"All right." He threw me aside and grabbed Chami. "Do you want your little brother to call her, Oliasso?"

I sat up, shivery and cold inside. "I'll call."

He dipped his fingers in the dried blood and smeared it around my face. My features turned numb.

"Now call her," he said. "Call her by copper, blood and bone!"

I made my mouth work. "Our M-mo-mother." My own blood beat like thunder in my ears. Would I see our mother's ghost—or some other thing? Whose blood was on my face? "I c-call by copper, b-bone and blood—"

Something ripped. The dim air in the shed tore apart. A tall black man, dark as our mother, stood wavering in ghostly form before us.

Uncle breathed; "Lord Mbanyo!" and seized me, holding me against his chest. "*Your* blood!"

The Seeming of our mother's brother loomed so tall that his ghostly form stooped under the shed's roof. He wore brass jewelry and a long loose robe, patterned like the adinkra cloth. A knife hung from a belt at his waist. His voice when he spoke was soft and deep and echoed in my ears like our mother's voice. "Where is my twin sister?"

Uncle ignored the question "You are in my power," he said. He smeared the blood off my face and rubbed some on his own. His voice was a little thicker when he spoke again. "I hold you by copper, blood and bone, and I hold your sister's sons." One strong arm tightened around my throat. I found it hard to breathe.

Uncle said, "And I will hold you here until your body dies for lack of its soul, and then you will have no choice but to serve me forever or perish."

"Where is my sister?"

Chami said, "She's dead, and our father's brother is mean to us!" He ran to the Seeming and looked astonished when his hand passed through Lord Mbanyo's form. He jumped back. "It's a ghost!"

"Not yet," Lord Mbanyo said, "though I will be if my soul is kept from my body too long." His gaze settled on Uncle, and he added scornfully, "Just enough knowledge of magic to do evil!"

Uncle hissed. "Enough to master you, and everyone else when I have *your* power at my service!" His voice became taunting. "You, great lord, you will listen and poison and spread fear for me, like the basest servant!"

"Or I can perish," Lord Mbanyo corrected , "which I prefer to do."

"He dipped his fingers in the dried blood and smeared it around my face. My features turned ..."

"Will you watch your sister's sons perish first—one by one, and very slowly, my lord? Have you ever seen a child's body torn by a leopard?"

Lord Mbanyo seemed to grow still. "You are a shape-changer?"

"He turns into a leopard and kills people," said Chami. "He tried to kill me, and Oliasso stopped him with our adinkra cloth!"

Lord Mbanyo said, "Ahh."

"Well, great lord?" said Uncle. "Shall I start with the oldest or the youngest? Which one shall be first?" His arm tightened again around my throat until black lights sparkled before my eyes. "It's so easy to kill a child."

"Let the boy live," Lord Mbanyo said in a voice like dust. "What do you want me to do?"

Uncle laughed. "What a fool, to sell yourself for children you've never seen before!" He eased his hold on my throat. "I want you to begin with the head of the council. Find out where he keeps his wealth, and when you do, frighten his household so they run away—and I'll seize his wealth."

I croaked, "Please let me go. My throat hurts."

"And mine is dry from so much talking," Uncle said. He let me go, leaned back, and grinned. "Oliasso, bring me some wine," he ordered. "You, Chami, come sit beside me while your brother fetches wine."

"No," said Chami.

I said, "Do as Uncle says!" The little one looked hurt and rebellious, but he went to sit at Uncle's feet. Lord Mbanyo watched them.

I picked up the red bowl and went outside. Standing in the bright sunlight, I whispered, "Our Mother——our enemy is thirsty."

I took the bowl back into the shed. It was brimming with palm wine. I knelt down and passed it to Uncle.

"I'm thirsty," said Chami.

Uncle grinned. "Share it with me." I had never seen him in such a good mood, and my heart nearly stopped.

I said sharply to Chami, "This is the best palm wine from Uncle's first wife. It's not for children!"

"But I—"

"Your brother grows wise," Uncle said to Chami. He put the red bowl to his lips and drank a long drink. He set the bowl down and grinned at me. "That is truly excellent—"

He screamed.

He clutched at his belly and clawed it. "Fire ants! Fire ants! My gut is crawling with fire ants!"

He struck at me. I jumped back.

Lord Mbanyo said, "Quickly! Wipe my blood from his face!"

I snatched up the adinkra

cloth and dipped it into the palm wine. I lunged for Uncle, who was still clawing at his belly and batting at me.

I swiped at the dried blood on his face. Chami saw what I was doing and leaped to help me. Uncle tried to cover his face. He shouted and struck out at the little one.

I climbed onto his chest and rubbed furiously with the wet cloth.

His fist knocked me backwards and made me see black lights again. I heard him groan. "Fire ants, fire ants in my belly!" Blinking, I saw him stagger to his feet. His face was clean.

"The adinkra cloth!" shouted Lord Mbanyo. "Lay it at my feet!"

I jumped up. Uncle made a grab at the adinkra cloth; it tore in two. There was a terrible, shrieking noise as it tore.

Chami screamed, "You tore our mother!" He jumped at Uncle and struck him with the red bowl right between the legs.

Uncle sank moaning to his knees. I caught up the two halves of the adinkra cloth and laid them at the ghostly figure's feet.

Lord Mbanyo stepped down onto the cloth. He was as solid as I was. He drew his knife and went Uncle and knelt down with the knife held at Uncle's throat. "Go and bring the elders," he said to me in a very gentle voice, but I knew there would be no gentleness for my uncle.

The river was smooth and still by our camp; beyond the shore, the dark forest rustled with the whispers of the dead. Lord Mbanyo knelt by our campfire. He placed the red bowl on a flat piece of stone, lifted his hand, and struck the bowl with a rock repeatedly, until it was powder.

Chami sighed, and Kiwaso blinked at tears. Our mother's brother looked at them sternly. "Are you so selfish?"

They shook their heads. Chami leaned against my side.

"Oliasso," Lord Mbanyo said.

I took up the pieces of the adinkra cloth. For the last time, our mother's presence drifted through the world; a fragrant wind kissed me.

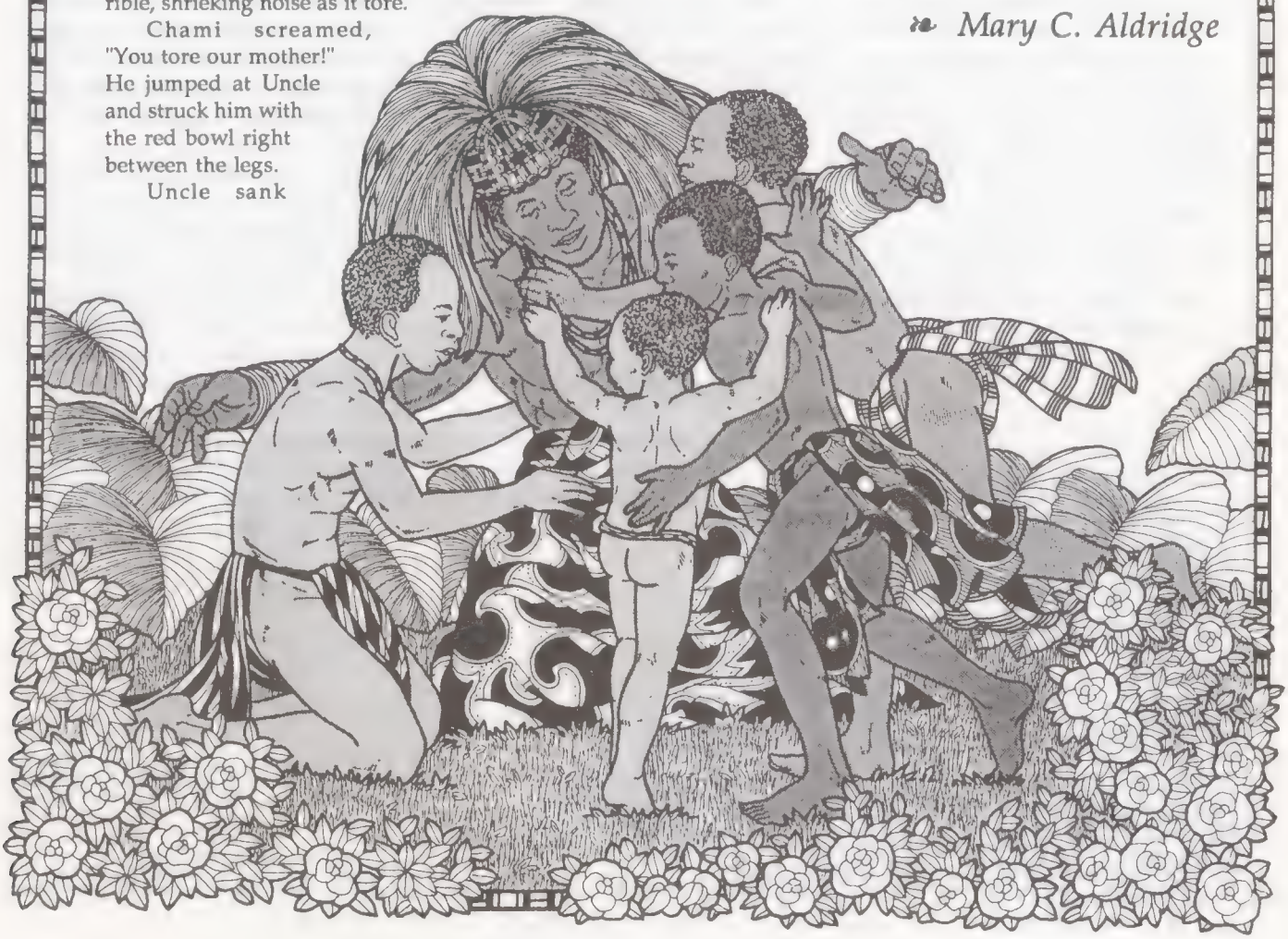
I placed the pieces of cloth on the flames. Lord Mbanyo carefully gathered up all the clay dust and dropped it into the fire; he dusted his palms over the flames. He said softly, "Go to the arms of our ancestors, my sister. Your sons are with me. Rest, now; sleep."

"Now she's gone," whispered Chami.

Lord Mbanyo held out his arms. Somehow he managed to get us all into his embrace.

"Now she rests," he said.

❧ *Mary C. Aldridge*



DREAM JOURNEY

by Janet Fox

Scorpia crouched behind a thin cover of spiny shrubs. The flat rock before her was an anvil, the sun a hammer. Heat rose in waves off a wilderness of stone and dry, stunted growth. Sweat trickled into her eyes despite the strip of cloth she'd rolled and tied around her head; those portions of her skin left bare by the rough, travel-stained garments, gleamed matte gold. Below her on the desert floor, two corpses lay sprawled, bloating a little in the day's heat, arrows sprouting from their bodies as confirmation of her skill with the tall, arched bow she held. Other enemies held to their cover, waiting now for the sun to do its work. She didn't really know why they were stalking her. She had taken them for robbers, for they had a swarthy, grimy look, and their clothes were ragged.

They had ambushed her as she'd stopped for water, frightening off her mount as they ran toward her jabbering in some barbaric tongue. Now she felt the lack of that water keenly. She could see the bronze-green gleam —just a scummed-over sinkhole-- but she dreamed of casting off her dusty chiton and immersing herself in the pool, stagnant though it might be, and taking swallow after cool swallow.

Something moved amid a stand of brush below her, and she fired on reflex alone. There was a sharp cry, and a man leapt to his feet, an arrow through his shoulder. He dived for cover behind some rocks before her second shaft could reach him. She tried not to think that, outnumbering her, they could easily have killed her on their first attack—if it was killing alone they wanted.

Her tongue felt as if it filled her mouth, and patches of darkness swam before her eyes. All that she could hope now was that they'd become impatient and break from cover, but that didn't seem likely. She couldn't surrender as she didn't know the word for it, and all in all it seemed a bad idea.

After a moment she slumped, and fell full length, her cheek touching burning stone. A rustling in the brush below, small stones rolling beneath feet as someone climbed the low shelf of stone on which she lay. The one in the lead looked surprised as she sat up, drawing back on the bowstring; then he looked helpless, taking the arrow in the throat and falling backward on his companions, themselves already shoving and jostling for running space.

The sun seemed not to move, slamming its heat onto the rock with unrelenting power. Her eyes were filled with it; wherever she looked she saw white afterimages. Water shimmered on the horizon like a nearby ocean, and she turned toward it, licking her lips, even though she knew it was a mirage. In the silence she could almost hear its roaring, as if it would cast her under swiftly running waves and cradle her in its icy depths...

A human shape appeared in silhouette above the edge of the rock, moving cautiously. She pulled at the bowstring, but her arm trembled and the shaft fell to the ground. There were other figures. She couldn't count them because she was falling, again. The sun, having completed its work, went out.

Stars seemed startlingly luminous in a patch of night sky framed in the opening of an enclosure of some kind. A man's outline was squarely in the middle of this opening, but his back was to her—a guard, she supposed. It was clearer now; the enclosure was a hide tent of small dimensions.

Her tongue was less swollen now; a dampened cloth lay across her forehead. As she reached up to remove it, a chain slid noisily across the ground. The metal shackle on her wrist trailed a chain fastened to a peg driven solidly into the ground; how solidly she couldn't be sure because she was still weak. Beside her was a clay bowl filled with water, and another of something...dried meat? *Food for animals,,* she thought, but drank and ate eagerly. She was glad she hadn't been harmed; but there was something ominous in that.

There was nothing else to do but rest, so she lay back. She hadn't yet fallen asleep when she heard footsteps outside. Someone had approached the guard and they were conferring in low tones. At first it sounded like an argument, but then they came to some agreement, and the second man handed over something, possibly money.

Scorpia didn't move as the indistinct shape entered the tent. She lay with head tipped back and eyelids slitted, seeming to be asleep. As he knelt over her, she could see a narrow, ratlike face with a thin bristle of mustache and a greasy strip of leather worn diagonally across his face to cover one eye. By his expression, she knew his intent, though she couldn't understand the words he was mouthing, in an undertone, as he fumbled to lower the front of her chiton. She made a noise of sleepy surprise and pleasure, raising her arm as if to embrace him. Quickly, the chain was looped about his neck, and there was enough strength in her arm to pull it tight. She couldn't stop his struggles, though, and a moment later the guard charged in crying out loudly in fear and anger.

Her captive's face had turned blue-dark, and his struggles were feeble by the time the guard was able to separate them. Dragging the limp body out of her reach, the guard returned, grabbed hold of the chain on her wrist and jerked it sharply. She fell to the floor, covering her head with her arms as she saw him pull some slack in the chain, and swing it back like a lash. Before it could strike, there was a harsh order, and a man of some girth as well as height stooped to enter. He was dressed richly compared to the others. Gingerly, the large man approached her, needlessly, as at the moment she had no desire to take him on. He reached for her dissheveled garment, but only to draw it up and refasten it at the shoulder; then with the attitude of a connoisseur inspecting some object in his collection, he twined around his finger some strands of hair that had escaped from its plait and said a word that later she'd know meant "golden".

Strangely, she felt uneasy, despite the care he was taking so that she would not be harmed. She sensed it was not herself he valued, exactly. It was as if she were some rare beast he had added to his menagerie, to keep it full fed and safe because of its value.

With sunrise the next morning, they began to travel. Since it was awkward not understanding anything that was said, Scorpia applied herself to learning the language. Since this was a rough gang of scavengers and slavers, no better than the robbers she'd taken them for, most of her beginning vocabulary was obscene or blasphemous, or both.

Straggling outposts of shepherd's huts and the hovels of poor farmers gave way to the noise, crowding and filth of a city. She was locked in a windowless, cell-like room almost as soon as they reached the city.

The next morning, she awoke to see two servants entering, carrying between them a tub with more water than she'd seen in one place for a long time. Telling her she was to bathe, they left it, along with a length of toweling and a sizeless, shapeless robe of white linen. She had just finished dressing when another servant returned, bearing a tray of steaming food, much more appetizing in appearance than her usual fare. Perhaps that should have made her suspicious.

Later, when she began to feel drowsy and sluggish, she connected the food with what she was feeling; when someone came for her, she willingly walked along with him without seeming to touch the ground--though the lightness was in her head, not her feet.

The bulky slave-master sat waiting, talking to someone else whom he called Ksim--perhaps a title of respect rather than a name, as he was elegantly dressed. As she looked at his coat of rich scarlet cloth, her eyes tried to follow the serpentine design worked into it with pearls and golden thread, but it made her dizzy...When she tried to study his face, she saw that he was looking at her, as well. His skin, hair, eyes, eyebrows, neatly-trimmed beard, all were different shades of darkness. *Alien*, she thought, *yet pleasing*.

"When one talks of strength," said the slave-master, "I can assure you—" His hand fell upon her shoulder, and she rocked back un-

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steadily.

"Strength of any sort is misplaced in a woman, according to The Law. You know that," said Ksim.

"Certainly, I only meant to say... But her coloring, surely that pleases you." He tugged at the sash to open her shrouding garment. "Golden, as I said...all over."

Ksim indicated a webwork of long-healed scars. "I've seen marks like that," he said, "on men who fight each other with knives."

The slave-master quickly closed the folds of her robe. "Probably only an unfortunate accident," he said placatingly. "Surely that doesn't change your opinion."

Scorpia, finding this exchange unutterably boring, stared into a corner, where the wind was waving a strand of cobweb in an interestingly hypnotic motion.

Ksim reached and opened her eyelids. "I just find it curious that you would drug her."

"But she was nervous and fearful," said the slaver. "I thought it a kindness."

"Ever the philanthropist," said Ksim. They then began bargaining in earnest.

It ended with Scorpia accompanying Ksim through the streets of the city, a heavy cloak and hood enwrapping her, and a dark veil covering the lower part of her face. The afternoon air revived her a little, and she was boosted onto the back of one of a string of mules carrying various bundles. Her wrists lashed to the saddle, they rode through a series of heavily-guarded gates and arrived at last in the courtyard of an ancient and ornate building. The interior reminded her more of a mausoleum than a palace, because of its musty smell of decay and lack of light, or of a prison, because of the locked doors, the gratings, and the presence of many guards.

Entering a large chamber, Ksim greeted another man, first bowing respectfully low, then leaping forward to embrace him. Although the stranger was as tall and almost as broad as Ksim, there was, she realized, something fragile about him. His eyes, distracted and brooding, had patches of purplish skin beneath them, and his face had an unhealthy pallor. He moved in a slow, deliberate way, with an air of listening for something.

"Jmil, my friend, you know I never visit without bringing a gift, something pretty to enliven this old pile of stones." Ksim pushed Scorpia forward, and the drug had now worn off sufficiently for her to resent it. Unexpectedly, she turned, robes and cloak swirling, and struck Ksim neatly on the cheekbone, and sending him sprawling backward onto the floor

Held between two puzzled-looking guards, Scorpia now found presence of mind to regret her act. Ksim's face was slowly growing red beneath its darkness. It would have been better to have saved her attack for some more opportune moment.

"The Law speaks; she dies," said Ksim, advancing as if to carry out the sentence without delay.

Jmil's soft laughter dispelled the tension. The guards forced smiles onto their grim faces, and released Scorpia at a signal from their ruler.

"This is the first time, my friend," said Jmil, "that your own gift has set you back upon your...dignity."

"I wonder," said Ksim, "if I am a friend for bringing her here. The gift was rashly chosen. Let me get you another, and deal with this one according to The Law."

Jmil laughed again, his color growing more healthy with the merriment. "Do you really think I lie awake nights afraid of my own wives and concubines?"

Ksim managed to produce a grudging burst of laughter, but his eyes never left Scorpia.

"We'll have her delivered to the women's quarters, and if I'm not pleased with her, later on I'll take you up on that exchange. Let's talk now, for we've not seen each other for nearly a year."

As Scorpia was being led away she yanked off her veil. The guard goggled and then averted his eyes as if she'd just stripped.

They penetrated deeper into the citadel, passing more locked doors, and more guards. These latter, in the innermost part, were eunuchs by their looks and chiming choirlike voices. She was turned over to two of them and conducted into what must have been the very center of the palace.

There was a little sunlight, mostly from slot-like windows in a dome overhead, but her first impression of the place was one of utmost gloom. Women lounged idly about or did light chores, moving with a slow langour that made Scorpia think of damned souls wandering the dimness of the Underworld.

Scorpia drifted about the women's quarters, her eyes missing little, but her common sense telling her that escape from this place might not be easy. As she crossed a large room, empty, and silent, except for the soft plashing of a fountain, she heard a sound like the shrieking of harpies.

Suddenly, the slight figure of a young woman appeared, raced through the doorway, and looked about desperately for a means of escape. A pack of other women followed her in, catcalling and teasing and prancing about, as if mimicking one who gives herself airs. Since the farther door was barred by a grating, the woman--more a child, Scorpia thought, because of her thin, waiflike face--stopped, her back against the edge of the fountain. As

the others closed in, she seemed to fold in upon herself like a dying flower, and crouched, oblivious of their laughter and poking fingers.

Scorpia was in their midst before they realized it, sending a big-breasted woman sliding away across the polished floor, and another, with a topknot of henna'd hair, somersaulting into the fountain. The rest drew back a few paces, but only to regroup. This was, after all, their territory.

The redhead in the pool stood up, spluttering, her finery drooping about her like moulting wings. "Oh, leave her alone," she said, pointing at the waiflike girl. "She won't hear anything we say anyway. She's already gone off to lullaby land, the way she always does."

Scorpia looked, and saw that the young woman was indeed unconscious, a state that she had evidently willed herself into as a means of escape. "What's her name?" she asked the redhead, who stayed, as the others stalked off, throwing insults back over their shoulders.

Red giggled. Some of the epithets Scorpia had placed before the word "name" had amused her. To the slavers, no noun was complete without a couple of obscenities before it.

"Her name is Tatiana, but we just call her Tash."

"Why were you teasing her?"

"I don't know, really. She's an official wife and is perhaps entitled to feel a bit better than we mere concubines, yet it's not quite *that* that she seems so proud of. Sometimes it's as if she pities us; I'm not sure if that makes sense."

"No, not much, but I do thank you for the explanation."

"I'm Hmisha, sometimes called The Dancer. I felt like a baby when you tossed me into the fountain, and you're not that much larger than I."

"I let you toss yourself in," said Scorpia. "Run toward me slowly." Hmisha laughed as she saw how the movement worked. "Maybe I'll teach you how to do it," said Scorpia.

"I've no reason to know such things," said Hmisha, in a shocked tone.

"I suppose not. I guess we're only kept here for one purpose...for Jmil's pleasure."

Hmisha laughed again. "Jmil can't take his pleasure in that way. For which some of us are thankful—but others are not. It's an evil of the blood." She patted a spot above her left breast. "If excitement causes Jmil's blood to run strongly, like a river in flood, he'll die. All the physicians have agreed."

Losing interest as Scorpia concentrated on wakening Tash, Hmisha wandered away. Nothing seemed to help, massage or waterdrops or shaking, so Scorpia simply kept vigil over the younger woman, looking down upon a face thin and pinched from captivity, yet with a smooth brow and eyelids that made her face like that of a sleeping child's.

Finally, her lips twitched, her eyes opened, and her body uncurled. Throwing back a cloud of fine black hair, Tash smiled, not so much at Scorpia as at the pleasure of some remembered dream.

"Tatiana."

"How do you know me?"

"Only your name. From the others."

Tash shuddered.

"I drove them off," Scorpia tried to reassure her. "You don't have to fear them."

"You're a stranger. I don't need you to fight my battles."

"Maybe we all need each other—in here."

"No one here is my friend. They all hate me, but perhaps they do have reason." Tash smiled, and not altogether pleasantly, so that Scorpia got a hint of what had so angered the others. "I can go home and they can't," she said, like a bragging child. "Just now, when you thought me sleeping, I was walking among the lime trees of my own garden. They were lovely, heavily foliaged, and palely powdered with dust."

"A dream?"

Tash shook her head and started to turn away.

"How did you come to be an official wife to Jmil?"

"A bargain, that was all. Between his country and mine. My father was forced to send me as a sealing of the alliance. A good position, he thought, especially if I bore a son. He didn't know how it was

with Jmil, and he didn't know I already had a lover. My distant cousin Anton was raised alongside me, as a brother; the only trouble was that we became more than brother and sister as we came of age."

"It's for him you journey home?"

"I visit him sometimes in his bed and cling to him. He's disturbed but cannot see me. I have little strength in my spirit form. Each time I go ajourneying my body grows a little weaker. Home draws me so strongly that someday my spirit will break free and leave my body forever. I'm sure that would please the others."

Scorpia couldn't help looking at the girl with pity. She could well be right about dying in one of her trance states; she did look frail.

"You needn't feel sorry for me," said Tash, rather sharply. "I don't want your protection or your pity. You stay here—in this hell--while I roam free, far past the locks and walls."

A few days passed, confirming Scorpia's judgment of the seraglio as a monotonous, dreary place, where there was little to do but get on each other's nerves. She was almost glad, at first, when she was told that Ksim was waiting to see her; but what business could he have with her now?

She was conducted to a small room where Ksim sat on the sole piece of furniture, a padded couch of purple velvet. His direct gaze as she entered made her remember what she was wearing: though an opaque veil covered the lower part of her face, the gown of pale blue gauze might as well not have existed at all, so airy was the weave.

He was silent, as if waiting for her to make some customary obeisance, but since she had no notion of what the gesture might be, she simply stood where she was. He touched thoughtfully the faint blue bruise on his cheekbone.

"He has decided," Ksim said at last.

Jmil had given her a formal inspection the day before. She'd found him kind, but preoccupied with his illness: constantly monitoring his own feelings... Ksim's presence made her wonder if, despite Jmil's smiles and easy manner of conversation, he'd found her lacking in some way, and had decided to return her, after all. Ksim seemed very calm now, but she wasn't sure she liked him better this way.

"He has decided to keep my gift."

Scorpia tore impatiently at the veiling about her face; how could one talk or think, smothered in hampering wads of cloth. Ksim averted his gaze politely, but muttered something, perhaps a curse, under his breath.

"Why can't he tell me himself?" she asked. "Why do you come here?"

"I didn't come only to say that," he said, rising quickly. She realized, then, that he wasn't supposed to be in a position where he had to look up at her. "This is another matter entirely, and I see that I'm the one at fault. I should have known what sort of monster I was bringing as a gift into my friend's home. I should have foreseen that he might, for reasons I can't fathom, even be attracted to you. And he is! I've known him since childhood, and sometimes it's as if I know what he's thinking. But perhaps you find it hard to understand my concern, friendship not coming so naturally to women."

"Friendship is never easy for anyone," she said. "Enemies are so much more readily come by."

"When his infirmity came upon him, I became a kind of protector for him."

"What I've seen of Jmil so far, I like, so he's in no danger from me, unless he stands between me and a way of escape. But that goes for anyone," she said, staring him full in the face.

"By The Law! Any woman who'd talk so to a man ought to be—"

"I've heard your message," she said in a bored tone, and turned away, a gesture of dismissal.

She should have realized he'd not accept it. A moment later, she was pulled roughly around, and held in a grip she wasn't so certain she could break. "My message is," he said, putting his face very close to hers, "if you harm him, by accident or by design, you'll die, and not necessarily quickly."

"Should you be so careless with Jmil's property?" she asked. He pushed her away from him, and stalked out of the room.

Hmisha met her as she returned to her quarters. "Back so soon?" she teased.

"Ksim had little of interest to say."

"Ksim often has little to say," leered Hmisha, "but no one seems to complain."

"You don't mean that Jmil has given him the privilege of—?"

Hmisha nodded. "Jmil is generous with his boyhood friend. He may choose any, except for the official wives."

"May choose any," she echoed, remembering how she'd taunted Ksim, and feeling suddenly vulnerable.

"Some of us wonder if perhaps one day Ksim may not do his friend the honor, in secret of course, of fathering a son for him, as there's not likely to be an heir born under these circumstance. But I didn't look you up just to gossip, I was thinking about what you said before about teaching me that trick of self-defense. And I suppose you might know other tricks as well. There

have been rumors about you, and the word they used was *'Amazon'*!"

"The word Ksim used was 'monster', but either one will do. And yes, if you want to learn, I will try to teach you."

The lessons began and several of the younger and more athletic women joined them. As they trained, Scorpia began to see a remote possibility, if there were some way to get weapons, of their becoming proficient enough to fight their way past the pampered palace guard.

They made mock weapons out of pieces of broken furniture, and drilled as if they were real. Even Tash, ever thinner and weaker, in her moments of consciousness between trance states, would take part in some of the drills and exercises. Scorpia was glad, because she thought this slim hope of escape might take the place of Tash's futile dreams, and give her a stronger hold on the real world.

Sometimes, though, when Tash talked of her dream travels, Scorpia found herself almost believing that the girl really could swim free of her body and visit her own land; but on more sober contemplation, Scorpia decided it was only Tash's desire to be free that created these strong impressions.

They were practicing, one morning, when word came that a man had entered the inner rooms. It had to be Jmil, for only he had the authority to do so. Quickly, as they'd often practiced, they hid the mock swords and pikes in cupboards and behind cushions; by the time Jmil and his guard arrived, they were sitting languidly around the room, chatting or sewing delicate wisps of cloth.

Jmil stopped before Scorpia, who was pretending to sew. As he watched, she jabbed the needle into her finger and mouthed one of the obscenities she'd learned—sometimes they were apropos.

"Sharp objects are dangerous, in some hands," Jmil said. "I've heard rumors that you've been training some of my women in the military arts."

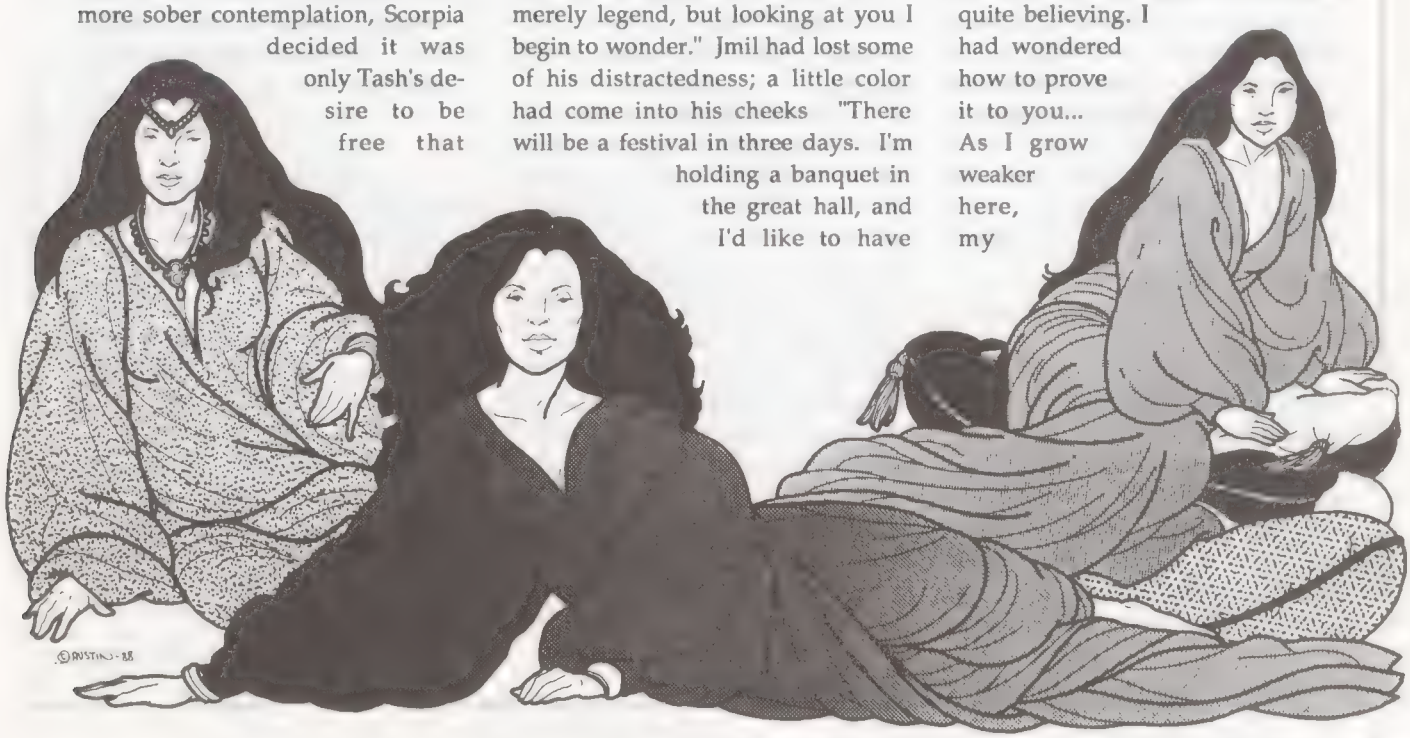
Scorpia briefly considered lying, but Jmil's eyes showed that he knew the truth. "Yes, I've enlisted and trained them. The responsibility is mine."

"There has also been speculation and gossip as to your origins. The name *'Amazon'* has cropped up. I had thought such creatures to be merely legend, but looking at you I begin to wonder." Jmil had lost some of his distractedness; a little color had come into his cheeks "There will be a festival in three days. I'm holding a banquet in the great hall, and I'd like to have your troop perform a mock combat. Ksim has suggested you fight a like-sized troop of cadets from the Royal Army. The weapons will be of wood—I believe you're already so equipped."

Ksim suggested, thought Scorpia. *Of course. When he delivered his message, he meant he had enlisted spies to keep watch on me. He's probably gloating at this very minute.*

After Jmil had gone, Scorpia went to look for Tash, who had not been present to hear of this latest development. She found the girl curled up against a wall, in one of her trances. Scorpia saw with alarm how much her physical condition had weakened: her facial structure was apparent through tightly drawn skin, and her eyes had sunken even deeper into their sockets. Scorpia doubted that Tash would live long enough to see their plan of escape either succeed or fail.

Tash smiled up at Scorpia as she awoke. She stretched out her almost skeletal hand toward her friend. "I know you listen to me talk of my wanderings without ever quite believing. I had wondered how to prove it to you... As I grow weaker here, my



spirit has gained strength. I was able to pick this and bring it here to you." Her hand opened, exposing a withered flower with petals like a swirl of pale violet silk.

Scorpia felt the hair prickle at the back of her neck as she accepted the flower. Jmil sometimes had baskets of blossoms brought in from his many gardens; she didn't remember any flower that looked precisely like this, but surely Tash had plucked it from some vase in order to make her dream seem more real. Tash looked so pleased about the flower that it seemed almost cruel to tell her what had happened to their escape plan; but Scorpia felt she had to.

"I don't mean to be a traitor to you," said Tash, "but I'm almost glad our plan was discovered; it was too dangerous, too rash. No, my body is destined to remain here forever, but I will go home...finally."

"Your father was cruel to send you here."

"He did what he could. He made Jmil agree that at Jmil's death I should return immediately home... They say he's in poor health." She smiled wanly. "Whatever state it's in, it has to be better than mine is now."

"Make *me* a promise." said Scorpia. "Fight your desire to go home. Stay here--just a little longer."

The banquet guests made loud, stamping noises, and gave rude catcalls, as Scorpia's troop prepared for the mock combat. Ksim gave her a pleased smile as they came in, but she ignored him, and positioned her women for the assault that would come from the other side of the room. The women looked sullen because of the orders she'd given them, but after so much time spent in training, she was confident they'd carry them out.

The cadets advanced, by their expressions unsure what their role was in all this madness. Wooden swords and pikes engaged, and for a moment the contest seemed almost equal; but the tide of battle turned quickly, and the cadets began to drive the women back. The boy Scorpia was fighting whooped as he realized his side was gaining the victory.

A few women successfully resisted, but most were driven back against the wall, and some were thrown to the floor by overenthusiastic opponents. Scorpia called out the word that meant surrender (so much, at least, she'd learned by now) and dropped her weapon. Waves of laughter came from the onlookers, along with crude jokes and jibes about the Amazon army.

"I think we followed your orders pretty well," whispered Hmisha. "I feel like a clown."

"We gave them what they wanted to see," Scorpia hissed back. "And what we can really do is still a secret."

Jmil climbed down from his place of honor at the dais, and brought her to stand before all of them.

"Bravely fought," he said, as the mob fell silent. "But who could expect the outcome to be different? Yet, as a reward for valor, I hereby declare The Golden to be my wife. All the proper ceremonies will be done at the proper times, but such is my decree, so that all may know." Jmil had more color, but there was an unhealthy look to the hectic rise of blood into his cheeks as they mounted to the dais. Jmil motioned for Ksim to make room for Scorpia at the table. Grudgingly, Ksim gave only enough space so that Scorpia had to sit uncomfortably near him.

"You never imagined, did you, old friend," said Jmil, "that in presenting me such a gift, you were bringing me a future wife! Did you think things would go so far?"

"I think they've gone too far," Ksim whispered into Scorpia's ear, while raising his glass and smiling, as if to toast Jmil's happiness. "And I think you'd do well to remember my warning."

"Surely," said Scorpia, turning to Jmil, and ignoring Ksim's elbow, pressed painfully into her ribs, as if by accident, "now that you've decided to wed me, I can make a request."

"Of course."

"You have a young woman in your seraglio, Tatiana by name. If she could be allowed to return home, if only for a visit...?"

"Tatiana, yes, I know her. Colorless little thing. But she can't go home, I'm afraid. Her father was my enemy, and her presence here is my surety that he will not raise forces and attack me again. But-what is your concern for her?"

"She's become a friend," said Scorpia, with a brief angry look at Ksim. "And if there's any way she can go home, I suppose I must see to it." Seeing that Jmil's wine cup was empty, she quickly filled it to brimming. Smiling at him over the rim, she took a sip herself before offering it.

Scorpia waited by the fountain, long after the lamps had been extinguished, and found herself remembering Ksim's warning. The vision of Tash, holding the crushed flower she'd sworn to have picked at home, kept blotting out any fears she might have for herself. But thoughts of Jmil and his kindness intervened, mingling guilt with anxiety and pity. *I've killed before,* she told herself, *and not always face to face! I've crept up by night on sleeping sentries and — How can this be any different?*

The coarseness of her cloak

rasped across naught but bare skin beneath. She'd have to be careful: if she should be discovered by Ksim's spies, creeping toward Jmil's bedchamber by night, she could forget Tash and save the sympathy for herself... She started as someone crept into the room; but it was only the serving-girl she had bribed to show her to Jmil's private chambers. No more than a skinny child, her eyes were wide and almost luminous with fright. "But what of the guards?" the girl asked as they set out.

"This should get us past them." Scorpia held up the Royal Seal, which she'd managed to steal, from a chain around Jmil's neck, during a rowdy moment at the banquet.

Glad, now, of the dark veils about her face, Scorpia moved anonymously through the sleeping palace. Each guard challenged and then was lulled by a glimpse of the seal. Finally, the serving-girl pointed to the door and scuttled away, losing herself quickly in darkness. For a moment, Scorpia wished that she could run away, too; then she confronted the last pair of guards.

They gave each other amused looks. It was late, but women sometimes did visit Jmil in his chambers, to dance for him or to give a soothing massage. The guards probably found the situation funny, though they wouldn't think so if they could read her mind.

The room was in total darkness. She spent some moments blundering over objects of furniture that had, seemingly, been left as traps for the unwary. When she reached the bed, she slipped free of her veil and cloak. It seemed a strange way to be planning to commit murder, and she wasn't certain how she'd feel about herself when daylight came, but for the moment, she was here, and this was no time to turn back.

She slid into the bed, beside him, into the aura of warmth around his body; Jmil seemed unmoving, insensible, sleeping as one drugged or dead. Her hands moved over him, her lips and teeth seeking vulnerable spots. Soon, she realized, he was awake, and already half aroused; she'd not thought it would be so easy. She pulled herself atop him, aware only of scents and textures, as her hands and mouth moved. Some of the guilt began to disperse. *This is the way I'd want it,* she thought, *were I as he. One bright moment before oblivion. No more frightened inching through life, avoiding its pleasures as much as its pain.*

Then there was no more time for conjecture, as his arms came around her, hard, and with a shifting of weight, she was toppled to lie underneath. For a moment, she was surprised that there was this much strength in Jmil's frail body; then she was surprised again—pleasantly.

When he collapsed atop her, after an immeasurable period of time, she thought it was done, and tears began to slide down her face, whether of relief or in self-recrimination she didn't know; but when she put her fingertips to his temple, she felt a pulse—very strong. *So! He's hardier than they thought.* She let her fingertips slide idly over his face, tracing the features, the shape of the nose, the arching of eyebrows, and realized that something was wrong. She struggled free of his sleepily clinging limbs and lighted the lamp. Its brassy illumination washed across the bedclothes, across her own nak-

Dream Journey

edness, and fell waveringly on the sleeping face. Ksim opened his eyes and smiled up at her, lazy and sated.

The lamp clattered to the floor, extinguishing itself, and she fled, using the seal as a talisman, or just pushing past the confused guardsmen. The serving-girl—the spy—she'd throttle her if she ever saw her again. *If I had my sword,* she thought, *I'd have done with this trickery, this skulking about in the dark. I'd cut out their hearts!*

But her rage would help no one. She was helpless to save Tash.

As Scorpia entered the fountain room, Tash looked up, wild-eyed. "Why, you're here! how can you be here, when I saw you with Ksim, in his chamber?"

"Hush, you were only—yes, I *was* with Ksim. But how could *you* know that?"

"I didn't mean to spy on your private life, of course. I told you, sometimes when I wander in my dreams, in and out of rooms, sometimes I chance on intimate scenes. But I never mean to—I—"

"You just --- wander freely throughout the world, leaving your body here?."

"That's what I kept *telling* everyone, but all of them, even you, thought I was mad. I think, if I ever really could go home—in my body, I mean—then the spirit journeys would end."

"You picked a flower in the fields of your own land, and brought it here. Do you think you could do the same thing with a weapon?- Say, a sword?"

"I don't know. Such a large object, but I guess I could try." Hope flickered briefly in the sunken eyes.

"No, I'm asking too much. Rest for now. Maybe someday, when you're stronger." Scorpia felt a wave of despair. Tash was too weak to bear such a burden; surely it would mean her death.

The next day, when Scorpia was told that Ksim again waited in the audience chamber, she could only imagine that he had come to gloat. She didn't want to face him, but as always, there were no choices here.

He sat composedly on the couch, seemingly no longer annoyed that she didn't kneel or sit. She expected an undercurrent of amusement, some suggestive remark, but he sat silently for some moments before speaking. "You would have *killed* him," he said, at last.

"It's lucky Jmil had a champion to make such a great sacrifice for him," she said, "but I'm through with the devious games you're so good at."

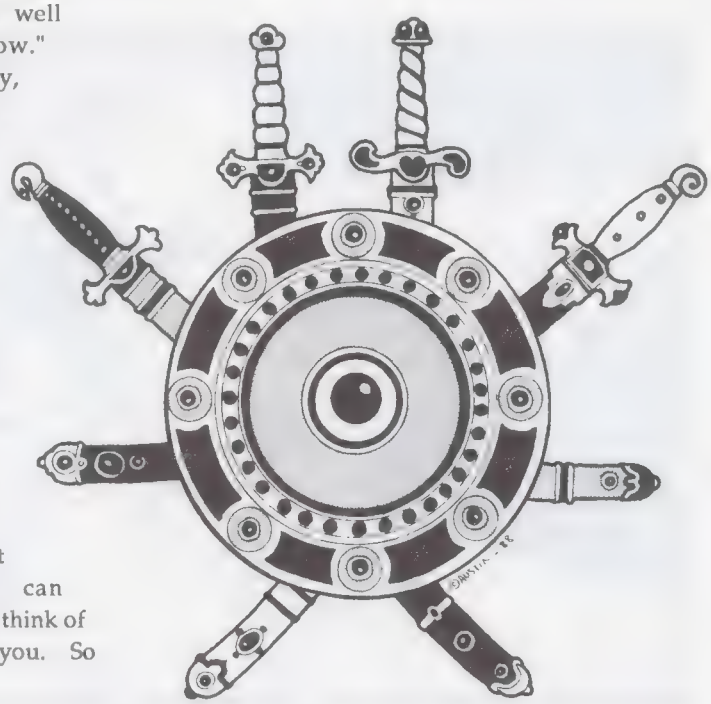
"You don't have to play them any longer, Scorpia. Jmil has told me, the marriage ceremonies are to be tomorrow, and by tomorrow evening, he plans to sire a son. He thinks *only* of your strength, in sons. Of course he'd not live out the night. I know that well enough now." Deliberately, Ksim rose. "Perhaps it might gratify you to know, it is not to protect Jmil that I have to kill you..." drawing his sword from its sheath, "but because I can not bear to think of him—with you. So much for a lifetime of friendship." He advanced inexorably, as Scorpia quickly backed away.

As her shoulder felt the wall behind her, Ksim leapt the last few paces forward, grabbing for her with one hand as he raised his weapon in the other. Suddenly, in midair, a ghost-sword appeared between them. Before they could quite believe it was there, Ksim, who was in motion, ran onto its point. Scorpia stood, holding the hilt as it took substance in her hand. She did not know if she felt guilty or not, as Ksim crumpled to the floor.

How familiar was the feel of the weapon in her hand... It was her own sword, stolen by the slavers. Would she ever know how, of all the weapons in the city, Tash had chosen this particular one.

As she knelt over Ksim, lifting his head to look into his staring eyes, there was a faint perturbation of the air, a sound like triumphant, ghostlylaughter, and then, like strange rain, other weapons appeared in the air, to clash and clatter on the tiled floor.

❧ *Janet Fox*



The Nine Basic Science Fiction Plots

or Maybe we're not all quite as original as we think we are but who cares??

One of the continuing preoccupations of writers, critics, and people who are interested in writing has always been the idea that there are only half a dozen or so basic plots, and that all others are variations of them. Someone once said that all Hollywood movies were variations of the "Cinderella" story, and while that may be overly simplistic (how do you fit in *The Ten Commandments*, or *Cleopatra*?) it certainly fits an awful lot of them. (And then there's always *The Great Train Robbery...*)

I suppose, when you really come right down to it, there is only one basic plot, which fits all fiction, whether love story, science fiction, Western, or crime novel, and everything from Dostoevsky to Arthur C. Clarke; it certainly describes everything from Tarzan of the Apes to Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. This basic plot could be summed up as follows: "The hero's attempt to live and do well in spite of everything harsh nature, his fellow man, or a vengeful God can throw at him." When I was just starting out to try and write s-f, and Jerry Bixby was editing Planet Stories, he was distressed at my inability to plot properly, and by my efforts to cover up my inability to plot by lots of what I used then to think of as "good writing". He told me, in exasperation, that he'd give me one good basic plot to use until I grew up enough to think up some of my own, and summed it up as follows: "Joe has his fanny in a bear trap and his adventures in getting it out."

Which, of course, is a less elegant version of the single basic fiction plot as outlined above.

But within this basic plot there are so many hundreds of variations and differing themes that science fiction writers have been credited with more originality than other writers of category fiction. Recently I sat down to analyze how many science fiction plots there actually were; and I came up with *NINE*. Only nine, and they describe everything from Hugo Gernsback to all of Harlan Ellison's Dangerous Visions. It's actually good discipline for a would-be writer, trying to learn to plot, to sit down and analyze his ten favorite—or hundred and ten favorite—stories, and see how they fit into these Basic Plots. So here they are.

ONE: The world is threatened and the Hero saves it. This one has a"natural switcheroo"; a villain tries to destroy the world, (or civilization, or a planet, or an asteroid base,) and is defeated.

Sound old hat? Well, there were plenty of them in the old days, of course. Almost all of Jules Verne, all of Sax Rohmer, all of Ian Fleming/James Bond (which I class as borderline science fiction) and there are some very modern versions by John Creasey under one of his pen names (which deals with a Sane Scientist who saves the world several times from various science-fictional paranoids or criminal types.)

TWO: The hero's personal struggle to find happiness on Mars.(For "Mars" read any alien world, planet, alien dimension, or what have you.) This is basically the Edgar Rice Burroughs theme, but it's been written again and again by everyone from Henry Kuttner to Lin Carter. This also includes some splendid "hard science" novels, for this is a story of the clash with an alien world per se; a planet boiling hot or icy cold, Jack Vance's *Big Planet*, *Iceworld*, *Dune*, or *Left Hand of Darkness*.

THREE: The clash of human and alien, also known as The Bems Next Door. (Theodore Sturgeon does this better than anybody else.) There are dozens of variations

on this basic plot, but they settle down into a few:

3.*A*: Boy meets Bem (or, boy meets robot)

3.*B*: Human masquerading as alien, or alien pretending to be human.

As I say, Ted Sturgeon comes immediately to mind. So does Hal Clement's *Needle;* or my own *The Colors of Space*. And when you come right down to it, *2001 AD* belongs in this category.

FOUR: We're property, or there are aliens among us. This could be called the Charles Fort Theme. Phil Dick's *Eye in the Sky*, and L. Ron Hubbard's *Typewriter in the Sky* are classic examples. There are two sub-categories, mostly explored by A.E. Van Vogt: aliens among us, surprise, I'm one (This was done exquisitely in a very short story, Don't Look Now, by the late Henry Kuttner) and aliens among us, surprise, you're one, as in Frank Robinson's *The Power*.

FIVE: Technology will destroy the world. There are again three basic variations of this theme. One is optimistic: technology tries to destroy the world, but is defeated by the hero, or an act of God: *Stand on Zanzibar* belongs to this category. The story where we all get on a spaceship and go somewhere else after we've worn out this planet is one example of this kind of thing. Then there is the switcheroo, in which technology destroys the world despite the best we can do. I think the bitterest version of this one is Cyril Kornbluth's *The Marching Morons*. Bob Silverberg's *Thorns* is pretty bad, too. (I mean grim, not badly written.)

SIX: And a good case could be made for saying this is a special case of *FOUR*, Aliens Among Us; I call it The Alien as Hero. The simplest level of this plot is the comic strip superman; the alien in hiding. On a more complex level it reaches philosophical heights such as those found in Olaf Stapleton's *Odd John*. Silverberg did the "switcheroo" on one with *Dying Inside*: instead of the mutant telepath as hero we find him as antihero, failure, metaphor of the destruction of man. It's the most tempting of the plots, the easiest to write on the comic-strip level and the hardest to do well.

SEVEN: "Listen, there's a hell of a good universe next door..." and this Basic Plot deals with the adventures of the Hero somewhere else—or sometime else. On the pulp level, this is the old Kuttner plot; the hero falls into another dimension and either spends all his effort trying to get back to his own place and time, or else discovers he likes it there and spends his time trying to carve out a niche for himself. More recently, it's been done as the *Transit to Scorpio* series, Lin Carter's *Green Star* series, and on a high level of intelligent sophistication, Daphne du Maurier's *The House on the Strand*. And yes, of course, this is a special sub-case of *TWO* —the search for happiness on Mars.

EIGHT: The quest. The hero goes out looking for something above and beyond himself, whether a lost city, a jewel of enlightenment, or a magical lost sword. One might characterize this as **the** basic fantasy plot—Sanders Anne Laubenthal's *Excalibur*, despite its many faults, is an exciting modern example—but it's been done in science fiction too. Try analyzing *Rendezvous On Rama*, and you'll see that it follows the basic Quest-novel theme, with pure scientific knowledge substituted for enlightenment. On a slightly more fantastic level, there's J.R.R. Tolkien, Talbot Mundy's *The Devil's Guard, Om*, and *Jimgrim;* and Poul Anderson's fine funny *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, though that could also be considered a splendid humorous example of *SEVEN*—the Universe Next Door.

NINE: and this category includes offbeat versions of all eight of the others; this is the "gimmick" story, the paradox story, the "all done with mirrors" story, where nothing is what you expect it to be. All the time-travel paradox stories, as opposed to the straightforward adventure-in-alien-time. This story is different because in this story, no matter how many characters there are, the gimmick is the hero. It's usually a short story, as you saw in our last issue with Dorothy Hydt's *Paradox Lost;* I can't think of a single novel where a gimmick carries it through. I suspect a lot of the stories I start to read, and can't, fall in this category. Like the last few Heinleins...

So there they are; if you want to boil them down into *six* categories, or *five*, or *seven*, maybe you're right, too. Because, after all, there's only one plot...

Which is where I came in.

Reading Julian May's Guest Editorial, you've probably noticed that she says much the same thing--as do the writers of our other guest editorials, past and hopefully future.

"There are nine and forty ways
Of composing tribal lay
And every single one of them is right"
Rudard Kipling

See page 64 to vote for your favorite authors and stories. Let yourself be heard!

FALLING APART

by Larry Hodges

"Crick!" came the booming voice. "Where are you?"

Crick looked up from his lunch at the sound. It was Master Vogo again. Crick grimaced, and took another bite out of his sandwich. What would it be this time? Out to the bat cave for bat dung? Hunt down a mountain lion for its whiskers? Or something worse? *All in the name of sorcery,* Crick thought with disgust. He was getting sick of sorcery!

"Crick!"

Yawning, Crick got up leisurely and strolled towards the voice. Master Vogo had had him running errands all over the place all day long, and the last thing he wanted was another one of Vogo's 'trips'.

"Yeah, Master?" he asked when Master Vogo was in sight. As usual, he was working in his laboratory.

The Master looked down at him from his great height. It always made Crick feel uncomfortable when Master Vogo did that—he was self-conscious about his own shortness, and the Master's contrasting height was unnerving. Even his nickname, Crick, was short for cricket, and referred to his lack of size. His real name was Ricky, but nobody had called him that in years. "I have need to journey for materials, Crick," Master Vogo said.

Crick stared. *You're going yourself? But you never leave the house! You're always too busy in the lab!* He bit back the words just in time, and nodded.

"You wouldn't need me along, would you?" Crick asked hopefully.

Master Vogo stared down at him. His eyes, always icy, seemed to bit right down into Crick's soul. "You have done well enough on your other tasks, although I have noted a certain lack of enthusiasm. However, this time I must go myself. Alone."

"If there is anything I can do for you..."

"There is," Master Vogo interrupted. Crick collapsed into a chair.

"In my absence, you will have to watch over the house," Master Vogo said. "See that nothing happens to anything in my laboratory."

"Sure!" Crick exclaimed, relieved at his light duties. "Your lab will be safe with me!"

Master Vogo stared down at him. "I will trust you," he said. "But pay close attention: nothing must be touched! Do you understand?"

"No problem!" Crick answered. "Not even a breeze will hit it." And with that, he dropped to the floor of the lab, pulled out a deck of cards, and started a game of solitaire.

There was a crack of thunder and a flashing light, and Master Vogo disappeared. Crick yawned. Vogo always used special effects in his sorcery, although he'd never used teleportation in Crick's presence before, the special effects were predictable. Crick concentrated on his card game. It was not going well. He stared at the card, and with a wave of his hand, a ten of spades became the ace of hearts. A moment later, he won the game.

After three years of apprenticeship, parlor tricks like that were all he had learned to do. He felt like a failure, despite Master Vogo's assurance that it took at least a hundred years to become a full Sorcerer. Crick didn't plan to wait that long. He was already fifteen years old, and was getting impatient!

He looked up at the shelves that lined the lab's walls. They were full of strange and colorful glass bottles, each carefully labeled in Master Vogo's clear handwriting. The shelves were high up on the walls, just right for one of Master Vogo's height, but just out of Crick's reach.

"I wonder what all the bottles are for?" he thought aloud. Although Master Vogo had never

FALLING APART

explained their purpose, Crick suspected that the many bottles were the result of years of lab work. It was the first time he had ever been in the lab without Master Vogo, and his curiosity was getting the better of him. He couldn't quite read the labels from the ground.

"Maybe if I stood on a chair, I could at least read what the labels say," he thought aloud. "I won't even touch them."

He positioned a chair against the wall, and stood on it. He looked at the labels on the nearest bottles. Most were labeled with a single word.

"Invisibility," he read, starting from his far left and reading as far as he could see to the right. "Teleportation. Thunder and Lightning. Rain. Explosive. Telepathy. Levitation. Enlarger. Solvent. Glue." He had never realized how powerful Master Vogo was! If all these concoctions worked, then his Master must be the strongest sorcerer on the planet!

He looked at the line of bottles again, and at the many more that were out of reach from where he stood on the chair. He had to try one out! This was his chance to practice some real sorcery! But he couldn't—Master Vogo had forbidden it!

But the one marked enlarger looked compelling. Just what Crick needed! But Master Vogo would kill him! Maybe if he used just a little bit? But he would see the change in him, unless he kept the change very small. Over a period of time, he could even add more, and not be noticed. But how much should he use?

He glanced out the window. A butterfly was fluttering about just outside in the flower garden below the window. Crick had an idea.

He reached for the red bottled marked 'Enlarger', and pulled it down. He took the cork out of the bottle, and peered in. The bottle itself appeared to be clear, but the fluid inside was bright red. He carried it to the window.

"Yo, butterfly!" he called out in butterfly. Talking to animals, even insects, was one of the first things he had learned as an apprentice. He often needed to ask directions to find the many items that Master Vogo needed for his sorcery.

The butterfly flew over to him. Although it understood him, it couldn't answer, having no vocal cords. It fluttered in the air just inside the window.

"I have something for you," Crick said. He poured a very tiny amount of the red liquid into a test tube in his hand, and held it out. The butterfly, hoping for something sweet, flew over. Crick suddenly threw the liquid at the butterfly, dousing it. Now wet, the poor insect fell to the ground, unable to support the added weight. It floundered about on the ground, trying to get back aloft.

"Sorry about that, old fellow," Crick said. "It's an experiment."

The butterfly didn't answer, and continued to struggle. Then it began to grow. Slowly at first, then more quickly. Soon its wingspan had increased tenfold. As it increased in size, its muscles became larger, and soon it was able to shake off the excess fluid. It struggled aloft again, and flew out the window just in time, as it was now barely able to fit through. Crick watched as it flew off, now the size of a small horse.

"Wow!" he said. He couldn't use the enlarger—it was just too powerful.

He got back on the chair, and examined the bottles again. "What would be a safe one to try?" he wondered. He was thoroughly intoxicated with these new powers. He had to try more. He spied the ones marked Solvent and Glue. What were they for?

He reached out for Solvent, a green bottle. It was just out of reach. He strained for it, and just got his hand on it. He was almost off balance now, and he tried to pull the bottle towards him. He slipped.

He fell to the floor, the bottle falling on him. It broke and green fluid poured all over him. He barely noticed, as he was busy cursing his fall. He had landed on his side, and hurt his right arm trying to break his fall. he stood up, and stretched the arm.

The arm fell off.

Crick stared at it, dumbfounded. His arm lay in a heap on the floor, leaving a stump on his right shoulder. No blood flowed. Crick sat down on a chair in shock. His right ear fell off, and bounced on the floor before coming to a stop. Crick sat dazed.

As he sat, his other arm fell off. Then his nose. He ran to a mirror just in time to see his other ear fall off, and stared at the hole where his nose had been. He returned to the chair just in time as his legs fell off, leaving him balanced precariously on his torso on the chair. Then his head fell off, rolling across the floor and giving him a thumping headache. It rolled to a stop against the wall, face down.

His consciousness resided in his head, but he seemed helpless. A moment ago he had been standing up, and now he had literally fallen apart! Why had he disobeyed Master Vogo's order that nothing was to be touched?

The dirt floor dug into his forehead and lips. He grimaced distastefully, fully helpless. Or was he? His tongue still seemed to be in place. Closing his eyes in disgust, he stuck his tongue out, trying to push his head over to one side. The dirt stuck to his tongue, making him cough convulsively, but he had no lungs to force the air out, so all that came out was a slight sigh. He finally succeeded in pushing his head over on its side, and he was able to see into the room again.

It was cluttered with the parts of his body. His legs were broken into three parts: feet, lower and upper leg. His arms still seemed to be joined at the elbow. He remembered the green liquid had doused most of his body, legs and head, but his arms had gone untouched. Not that they could help him now. He would have to just lie here until Master Vogo

returned.

Crick shook with terror at the thought. His Master would kill him! He'd never be trusted again! He'd probably be sent back home in disgrace. No, he had to get out of this predicament himself.

He stared at his fallen nose. He was still 'breathing' instinctively through the hole where his nose had been, although little air was actually going through, having no lungs. But as he went through the motion of breathing, the nose seemed to twitch, as if it didn't know it was no longer attached. On a whim, he tried to wiggle his no longer existent nose on the hole above his mouth. The nose on the floor wiggled. He still had control over it!

He looked at one of his feet, lying still on the ground. He made it wave its toes about, and convulse on the ground. He wasn't completely helpless—just mostly so.

He spied his arm. He waved his hand at himself, and moved each finger experimentally. Then he concentrated on his right hand. Using the fingers and hands, he had that hand drag itself over to himself on the floor. He did the same with the left. But what good did it do him?

An idea struck him. He had the two arms meet, and clasp hands. After a bit of practice, he got them to move together and rise up off the floor, using the base of the arms, where they had once met at the shoulder, as feet. With hands clasped, the two arms became a biped creature, able to walk about, unsteadily, on its two 'feet'. They fell over every few feet, but he was able to get them back up each time. With practice, he became proficient at walking them about the room.

It was strange watching his arms walk about on their stumps, like some sort of sorcery. He had them dance about and leap into the air, doing pirouettes on each stump. It was very interesting, but not very helpful. He had to go about getting himself back together again.

He walked his arms over to the chair where his torso still sat. Running the arms against the chair, he knocked it over, spilling the torso over. He groaned at the impact—he could feel its pain! Crick noted that he was still breathing. He walked the arms over, and gingerly placed one stump into the shoulder, trying to reattach it. It seemed to fit in, and so he tried to move the arm about from the shoulder. It started to move, then fell off again. It was no good—it wouldn't hold.

He desperately needed something to hold his body parts in place, but could think of nothing. Then he spied the talking stone. He could call up Brenda, and she could come help him! He walked his arms over to the stone (which, fortunately, lay on the floor in the corner) and clasped it between his hands. He walked it over to his head, and dropped it by his mouth.

"Brenda!" he called. Brenda was a twelve-year-old who lived next door about a mile down the road. She was apprenticed to Master Quinn, and often she and Crick practiced their simple parlor sorcery together. At the sound of her name, the talking stone should tune in on her.

"Yes?" came her voice from the stone. He could feel her presence.

"Brenda!" he whispered. He was unable to speak any louder without the lung-power of his torso.

"I need your help!"

"Can you speak up?" she said. "I can barely hear you."

"I can't talk any louder," he whispered. "I'm in trouble!"

"I'm a little busy right now, so you'll have to get out of the rubble by yourself," she said.

"No, you don't understand!" he exclaimed/whispered. "I'm falling apart!"

"Well, calm down!" she answered. "You sound like you're going to pieces!"

"I am!"

"Then go see Dr. Bloyd, the psycho-sorcerer." Her presence started to fade away.

"I mean I really am going to pieces!" he said.

The presence came back. "Is this because I didn't invite you to my birthday party last week?" she asked. "I told you I was sorry, but it was kinda private, and—"

"No, that's not it!"

"Oh, good. Well, I'll be seeing you." Her presence left.

"Brenda!" But it was too late.

He stared about the room at his scattered parts. Then he shuddered. When his body had fallen apart, most of his clothing had fallen off, leaving embarrassing parts showing. Maybe he was glad she hadn't come!

He eyed the bottles still lining the room on the shelves. Maybe one of them could help. he couldn't see any of them from down on the floor, so he struggled to remember the ones he had seen before. Invisibility, Levitation, Glue—what was glue doing up on the shelf? It didn't seem magical. But it was just what he needed now!

He walked his arms over to the wall again. The chair was on its side now, so he couldn't use it to boost the arms up. He spied a wire

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coming out of the ceiling. The electrical cord for the ceiling light! Hurray for modern technology!

He set his arms to work going up the cord. It was hard work, as they had to pull themselves up with their fingers, pulling the heavy arms behind, but they made it to the top, and jumped off onto the shelf. he walked them over to the blue bottle that he remembered was marked Glue. He clasped it in the hands, and then stopped. How was he to get it down? He couldn't climb down the wire again, not while holding the bottle. There was only one way. Clasping the bottle between the hands tightly, he jumped.

He grimaced as they hit the floor. That hurt! But the bottle was intact. He walked it over to his head, and examined it. Sure enough, it was the one marked Glue. He walked it over to his torso, and leaving it there, had his arms drag over a leg. He pulled the cork out of the bottle with his hands, and poured a small amount of fluid onto the leg sockets. He jammed a leg into place, and then moved it experimentally. It held.

He put the other leg in place, using the glue, and then his right arm. They all held. He picked up his left arm in his right, and after applying the glue, jammed it into place. He got up, and walked his body over to his head, and picked it up, jamming it into place with glue. It was on crooked—the room suddenly seemed slanted—so he pulled it off and put it back on more carefully. Then he walked about, gathering the scattered parts of his body, and replacing them. Soon he was whole again. He set about cleaning up the mess h had made from the broken Solvent bottle, whistling cheerfully.

He heard a sound of thunder, and a flash of lightning, and Master Vogo appeared in the middle of the room. Crick sheepishly waved at him. The Master looked about the room. All seemed in place, except for the chair that still lay on its side, and one missing bottle from the shelf, as well as one now empty. Crick couldn't tell if his master had noticed anything wrong. The Master peered down at him.

"Did you touch anything while I was gone?" Master Vogo boomed.

"No *sir!*" Crick replied.

"And I presume you know nothing about the giant butterfly that ravaged the city today?"

"Giant butterfly?" he gasped.

The Master stooped down to eye level with Crick. "Do you really wish to be a sorcerer?" he asked.

"Very much so!" Crick exclaimed, now afraid. Well, at one time he had.

"It is true that I haven't trained you as adequately as I could have these three years," Master Vogo said softly. "I have been so intent on my work that I haven't paid enough attention to your training. But I want you to promise me one thing."

"Yes, Master Vogo?"

"Never lie to me."

Crick stared down at the floor. Then he looked up at Master Vogo. "I'm sorry. I did lie. I disobeyed you, and used some of your bottles. It's just that, well, I really want to be a sorcerer, but I never seem to be able to do anything. It was my first chance to do some real magic."

Master Vogo nodded his head. "It's time you started advanced training," he said. "Are you interested?"

"Yes!"

"Well, we're going to need supplies," Master Vogo answered. "Let's see, lion whiskers, bat dung, eye of dragon—here, I'll write you a list, and as soon as you get the ingredients, we'll begin."

"All right!" Crick said excitedly. As soon as Master Vogo had written the list, he snatched the paper and started for the door. "I'll be back in just a few hours!" he said.

"And Crick?" Master Vogo said.

"Yes?"

"Before you leave, could you put your nose on right side up?"

Crick felt about his face, and found his nostrils were on top. He sheepishly pulled off his nose, and put it back on right side up. His feet were killing him, but in his rush, he had barely noticed them. But now he glanced down.

He had instinctively put his right boot on the right side, the left boot on his left side. Only, only—his legs were reversed! His big toe was on the outside! He had put them on the wrong side! They were much heavier than a nose, and he would have to get a new supply of glue. He hoped he could get some without having to ask Master Vogo.

"When you get back with the ingredients, the first thing we'll make is glue," Master Vogo called out to him, smiling. *"Now hurry up!"*

Crick didn't even bother to change shoes.

❧ *Larry Hodges*

Results from the Cauldron - Issue # 2

First Place : **The Bone Serai** *by Susan Shwartz*
Second Place : **Paradox Lost** *by Dorothy J. Heydt*
Third Place: **Mary Rose and the Devil** *by Stephen C. Fisher*

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MZB*fm* LETTERS

DEAR READERS,

The other day my executive editor, Jan, repeated a remark she's heard: that we were all a batch of male-bashing feminists. I wish that the person who made that remark would come around to protect me next time somebody attacks me for having sold out to the male establishment, whatever that is.

One can't please everybody, so we may as well please ourselves. But judging by the letters we get, we're pleasing *somebody*. For instance:

LYNNE ARMSTRONG-JONES,
London, Ontario, Canada

I've just received Volume 1, Issue 2, which contains my first published story. I cannot thank you enough; the artwork and layout are superb. (I love the artist's conception of my 'thing'!)

Lynne, you made it easy for us by not describing the 'thing' too much and making the artist's work easier. MZB

(The artist was Alicia Austin who has done great work for us again- see *The Adinkra Cloth* and *Dream Journey!*) JLB

J.B. NEUMANN,
Daly City, CA

A new magazine is always a delight, though I didn't take Poul Anderson's suggestion to dance in the street. Two reasons mainly: (1) there are enough oddballs hanging around Telegraph Avenue and (2) I'm a miserable dancer. I did do the next best thing; I immediately bought the first issue and read it on the BART home. I enjoyed it and was honestly impressed.

In fact I was so impressed that I would like to get in on this game. Do you prefer only European/medieval fantasy, or would you welcome stories based on other mythologies? Do you prefer historical fantasy over contemporary fantasy? Do you accept Lovecraftian-style horror? How about cartoons?

I think there should be a fifty-year moratorium on imitation Lovecraft; however, stories which give us a real shudder are always welcome. One of our main stories this month, "The Adinkra Cloth", is based on an African legend, which should answer some of your questions. As for cartoons...yes, but they shouldn't be the kind where everybody in the office goes around asking "What's funny?" In fact, we want every kind of fantasy which interests us—and we may not know what that is till we get it.

KEVIN LIQUORI,
Plantation, FL

Let me begin with some of that common praise you are used to—but enjoy. Of the many other publications along the lines of fantasy and/or science fiction, I rate yours on TOP!

Marion Zimmer Bradley, you have "affected my universe!" I am now responding to "Trialogue: Two Worlds of Fantasy." You've touched a delicate area in my universe. In contrast to your views, I find Lovecraft quite successful in style. HPL's syntax is only one of the literary devices he utilizes in creating true Horror. As Mr. Leiber says, "It makes the basic point." Lovecraft's style definitely strengthens the pillars of his fantastic worlds. I feel I am actually living the experiences of his characters, however dreadful they are. The darkness in his stories emphasizes the horror he creates; where brightness would detract from his ultimate goal—ultimate Horror. In your article you make a distinction between...a bright world of fantasy and a dark world of horror. Lovecraft wrote horror. I do agree that many of his themes seem overdone, but as Walter Breen points out, perhaps he did not live long enough to write of other worlds.

I hope I did not come off as a complaining Lovecraft fan, just voicing my side of the universe.

No, indeed; someone said that differences of opinion were what made horse races interesting. I personally add "That takes for granted—which I doubt—that they are interesting." As the Chinese say, it has long been known that one horse can run faster than another.

But I agree with you that Lovecraft is one of the greater writers, perhaps the greatest, in his field; here we are still talking about him after the poor man has been buried forty years. I should live so long!

M. ELAY HARVEY
Enumclaw, WA

An an avid reader of F&SF, I found the stories entertaining; I especially liked Millea Kenin's "Arady Mountain," a beautiful story with plenty of feeling, and the only one, in my opinion, that did not have some flaw. In the autumn issue, Jayge Carr's "*Hitchhiker*" was a perfect piece of

mysterious wonder. "*The Bone Serai*" started well, drew me right in, but the reader was not given enough background to except [accept] the ending. There should have been some reference to legends about the Serai, their disappearance, and the hand, so when they return it doesn't seem like a "rabbit out the hat" ending. It bothered me because the story had such fine potential. I would have sent it back for a rewrite, if I were an editor; it's a shame to see her miss by such a delicate margin.

I'm sorry, but "*The Vision of Aldamir*" was so incomprehensible in the opening that I was immediately lost and passed it over. There's no excuse for publishing vague writing. A professional writer would never use the noun "things" (second word of the story) when he means "beings." I mean, they could be anything, ravenous microwave ovens! And in the next three paragraphs we're subjected to more obscurity: "kin", "forms", "figures", "the Border." The border between "what and what". Too much; the reader has no idea what's going on because Zimmer's not telling, he's stabbing in the dark. Where's his scene setting? Where's his character introduction? He needs to slow down, tell us Who, Where, When, What's trying to be accomplished and Why, and what are the obstacles. Perhaps if I'd read *Heritage of Hastur* it might have made more sense; even so, the writer can't expect the reader to do his work for him. This story violates your own rules: "A likable character overcomes almost overpowering odds to win a worthwhile goal." Just to be sure, I forced myself to wade through the entire first page. Nope, he still hadn't introduced the main character, so how can we like him? You know, this reads like a badly condensed synopsis of a novel: too amateur for a prozine.

Well one bad story isn't going to turn me off; I loved "*Mistaking the Dragon Mage*," a delightful surprise; and "*Paradox Lost*" had a comforting message. "*Trialogue*" was fascinating. I hope this will be a regular feature; it's better than sitting in on a panel at a con. That said, I would like to support the market (we need all we can get); here's my ballot and a subscription.

My big problem was that I didn't realize "Vision of Aldamir" *was not self-contained because I am so familiar with Paul's work. This is the major problem with printing work by one's brother: a pitfall for an editor. I'm afraid that reading* Heritage of Hastur *wouldn't have helped you; that's one of my books, not Paul's. He and I both used the name, but not for the same characters. In future I'll try to make sure everything is self-contained. At least my readers will never get the idea (I hope) that people here think they're perfect -- and if we did the reader would be quick to tell us how mistaken we were, which is how people learn.*

Susan L. Johnson
Arlington, VA

I am not as articulate as your other readers, but I loved my first two issues of your magazine and all the stories in them.

My three-year-old granddaughter and her friend kept thinking issue #1 must be one of her books and lugging it off every time I put it down.

Well, you're starting her off right. Too many kids never see anything but television. Articulate or not, we love hearing from everybody, so everyone who wants to express an opinion should.

M.E. Bradley
Manchester, NH

The wait was agonizing but well worth it! I love "*Fantasy Magazine*"! I never seem to get enough of the stories I like reading, only in your *Sword and Sorceress* books, and the wait was so long between books!

I like the mix of stories and commentaries, and also the story bios on the contributors. I have never yet been disappointed in any of the stories you have included in your various works. After reading their stories in your anthologies, I have gone looking for their books (especially as you are kind enough to mention their other works). I know that if they are in your anthologies they are authors well worth reading -- Jennifer Roberson is a brilliant example!

You certainly didn't make our voting easy. I had three favorites -- worlds I didn't want to leave, people I wanted to know better. But "*Luck of the Draw*" intrigued me the most. I hope Elizabeth Dobecki will continue to write. I hope, too, she'll give us more tales of Temi and Danzelle; I'd like to see them experiment and test their power.

Thank you for "*Fantasy Magazine*," and thank you for letting us vote on our favorite stories (I think that's a great idea). I look forward to the next issue.

That's the general idea; editors want to promote our readers. Some people think writers and editors exist in an adversary position, but the best editors -- may I tip a hat to the late revered Judy Lynn del Rey -- change what is written to clarify it, so the readers won't get lost in a jungle of angling participles and a forest of overhanging adjectives. Most editors, when opening the mail, really want to discover another Lord of the Rings. *(And what do they usually get?)*

Barbara M. Armistead
New Port Richey, FL

My only experience at editing came back in the dark ages when I was in college... Even then, we had a problem with plagiarism, and I inadvertently published a poem cribbed from the pages of a women's magazine. As there was no money involved, we could just refuse to accept any more of the student's offerings. This did not disturb me too much, as I privately thought it was sentimental tripe. I often wondered how that student made out later -- she was in art class with me, and copied paintings, too. Where's the joy? When you essay something difficult or new, and you pull it off, it's like a rocket ride to the moon. When you copy someone else's stuff, it may be an educational experience (though I question that, too), but it certainly isn't exhilarating, or even satisfying. It's a lot like

LETTERS

the kind of bread you can leave your fingerprint in just by touching it. It may keep you from starving, but is it really food?

I've got to get ready for an early supper, so we can visit Dad at the hospital. He fell, about a month ago, and broke his hip, and had been hobbling around until it got so bad he couldn't navigate anymore. Thanks to the wonders of modern science, he should be out in about ten days, with a nice new hip joint. This would have been the equivalent of a death sentence a few years ago. Let those who will kick at technology. It has its uses.

Yes -- now nobody dies of pneumonia at thirty; people die at ninety of kidney failure -- and are kept alive by machines and a tube at both ends when all vital systems fail. In fact, they've eliminated all the easy ways to die. Jan, my managing editor, says technology is perfect -- it's us that are not perfect. We still have to make choices -- and if we don't, technology will make them for us. And that's the lesson for today, kiddies. The problem is not the scientific age -- but how we react to it.

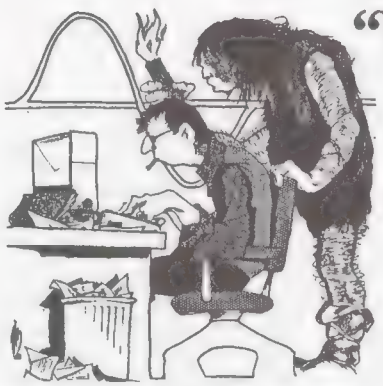
Uncle River
Mogollon, NM

I have thought for some time that I would want to submit this story to your magazine. However, I waited untill a trip down from my mountain ghost town home allowed me to obtain a copy to read first. I have been enjoying your Autumn 1988 edition the past few days. I found "*The Bone Serai*" and "*Paradox Lost*" particularly memorable. I also read your column addressed to writers with much interest. I have been spinning words since 1953, when I began dictating them to my mother shortly before learning to write myself. I first saw a story of mine in print in 1976. I first got paid for my writing in 1985. That's a long apprenticeship, but it seems to be starting to pay off. The enclosed article is just one example of the positive response my writing has been receiving lately. Allow me to pass on a recommendation, by the way, that you might like to share with writers just beginning to go public: Local audiences are a wonderful source of feedback.

***Welcome aboard** -- our favorite readers and would-be writers -- (I started writing as you did, before I could actually write, and my mother still has some poems from that time; I live in fear that she'll be persuaded to make them public). Personally I object to promiscuously sharing my work in the incubation stages -- never show your work except to people who can sign a check -- but to each his own. In principle, you're perfectly right.*

Jan points out that in order to get good submissions we have to have good stories submitted, and in order to get good stories submitted, we have to print good stories. It's like the chicken and the egg -- or the business of going on stage: you can't get in the union until you have experience, and you can't get experience until you're in the union. That is why so many magazines -- and so many Broadway shows -- never get started. Writers too have that problem -- some people say you can't sell without an agent -- and the kind of agent you can get without being published first isn't worth having. But we're here -- so far.

MZB



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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

COUNTER EXAMPLE

by L.A. Taylor

"What? You mean you haven't told them?" Allyssa strolled toward me, thumbs hooked over her hipbones and fingers spread on her back. The old scowl creased her forehead.

"That's right." I leaned forward and set my glass of sherry on the coffee table.

"Don't you think you've left it a little late? Tammie's nearly sixteen already."

"No, I don't think I've left it a little late." Slightly cowed, as usual, by my big sister, I glanced regretfully at the glass I'd just set down. Too soon to pick it up, and I'd probably gulp the whole thing at a swallow if I did. "I'm not sure I'm going to tell them at all."

"What?"

We could be twins, if Allyssa weren't two years older than me. Does that mean we have to think exactly the same way? Not if I can help it. "Can you give me any good reason?"

"Well, but, but---"

"You aren't the one with children," I pointed out as she sputtered.

"I *chose* not to have daughters. You know that."

Allyssa sounded defensive. Maybe I'd get out of this yet. "So don't tell me how to handle mine."

Through her teeth, hissing, a threat: "Husbands. Lovers. Semen-engendered sons!"

Shaking inside, I raised one eyebrow casually.

"Women have lived with them for generations."

"*Other* women! Not us!"

The front door slammed. "Mom? I'm home," called my youngest. Allyssa whirled and pretended to be pulling dead leaves out of the spider plant hanging in the wide east window. A round red spot, like inexpertly applied blusher, burned on the cheek I could see.

Julie dropped a stack of books onto the coffee table and plunked down beside me on the couch. "Hey," she said. "What's up?"

"Nothing much," my sister said steadily. "Why don't you go find yourself a snack?" With Julie safely in the kitchen, Allyssa flashed me a glance that would have left me trembling twenty years before. "We will continue this discussion later," she said, and reached for the green sherry bottle.

* * *

I am still ill-suited to being the mother of three female Trekkies, which, alas, I am. Their discovery of, and enthusiasm for, what in my estimation is a rather mundane television series, its spin-offs, and endless, endless reruns, has led me into a year of serious self-examination, as I suppose was both inevitable and overdue. Still: what girls think significant is really quite minor--the two in love with Mr. Spock, for instance, are thrilled to have inherited my upswept brows, but are disappointed in my neat round ears; the one who favors Captain Kirk resents the browline she must carry but finds the ears quite pleasing. Amusing, in a way.

When my hand falls naturally to lap or knee or over one of my daughters' shoulders, a space appears between the ring and middle fingers and the outer pairs of fingers lie together. Somehow none of them noticed this in pre-Trek days. Now---

"Will you stop making fun of Spock!" Tammie demands, with all evidence of the family temper.

"Mom, do you have to do that?" Kendra whines.

The one raised brow---a signal Tammie knew perfectly well at the age of three meant 'stop what you're doing this instant and mind your manners'---she now takes to be derision, directed at her hero. When enlightened I raised both eyebrows slightly, chin rising.

Counterexample

When presented with a new idea, I am likely (like my grandmother) to murmur, "Interesting. . .". I am poker-faced. I am solitary. Need I say more? Any human mother of a teen-aged girl will know my Spock fans barely tolerate what they believe to be my sneering at the Vulcan, and that the Kirk fan, for different reasons, likes none of it any better. Fortunately when cut I bleed as red as any women ever did. If my blood were as green as Spock's, they'd probably think I'd arranged *that* to mock the Vulcan, too.

And then, I am a scientist.

This gives me little trouble with my Kirk fan, who is mostly concerned to retrain the way her fingers fall when her hand relaxes. The---what shall I call them? Spockies? Spockettes?---are of the impression that their hero represents the highest reach of scientific endeavor known to man. True, Spock shows curiosity, essential to any scientist, but, so far as I can see in my occasional trips past the television when the nightly re-run is on, he does so only when convenient to the plot line. His celebrated "logic-alone" is a poor tool for real inquiry, which proceeds by hunch and hump, and drags in design and argument as necessary afterthought. The burning desire to know, to figure it out, Spock seems to lack. Through his example *my daughters* believe that science *proves* things, and remain quite unaware of the power of the counterexample to demolish an otherwise attractive hypothesis.

Infuriating. Well, I'll allow that science does establish facts, as I have established to my satisfaction that my mother's conjecture was correct: like summer aphids, I and mine are haploid in every cell.

Now you know: I'm a geneticist.

I have three haploid daughters---that is, they, too, have only twenty-three chromosomes in each cell, half the normal number for a human being. I can only conclude that our egg cells are formed through mitosis rather than the usual meiosis, which would more or less halve the number of chromosomes yet again: how else to explain generation upon generation of parthenogenesis? I suppose I might mate with a human male and conceive a child. The sexual act is not only possible but enjoyable, the number of my chromosomes would be correct, and so far as I can determine they would form the proper pairs. I have no direct proof of this. I can't exactly pop a laparoscope through my own bellybutton and prise out an egg to slosh in a dish with stolen sperm; the more direct form of the experiment does not appeal to me at the age of forty-five. Such a pairing would also be the end of the line of my kind, whatever we may be. Strangers who meet me with my daughters and turn, smiling, to say, "You must have strong genes," have put their innocent fingers directly on the problem.

I was born in April of 1943. My "father," a fictional creation, was supposed to have died in the Pacific. Wars have, historically, always provided us with good excuse for fatherless children. (My mother was born in 1917.) I used the Vietnam War to explain my oldest (1971); its extension, post traumatic stress syndrome, to explain the "desertion" by the "father" of the middle one (1972); and plain brazened it out with the last (1974). Fifteen months apart is close spacing---ask anyone with three kids in diapers---but I wanted three, and I wasn't getting any younger. We, like normal human women, have our menopause, our imperfect copies.

Given present mores, my daughters, should they choose to have girls of their own---sons, you understand, are impossible---will have less trouble. Should they choose. The meditation needed is arduous even to learn. Perhaps they'll just find fathers for their children and our line will simply cease. As Allyssa discovered this afternoon, I haven't yet decided to tell my daughters how different they are from their friends. In a way I suppose I should be grateful to Leonard Nimoy for creating Mr. Spock to absorb the affections of my oldest. He's given me more time to dither.

Watching my children grow has proven---ah, hell, I'll say it, *fascinating*. I have filled dozens of notebooks showing the effects of nature versus nurture, studies on these clones of myself that I can never publish. Genes, for example, determine that moles will appear on the skin, but not where; they determine build, but not the fine detail of skeletal structure that sets one of my children off from the others; they determine the outline of personality, but not the ways in which it is expressed. All of us are intelligent although our interests vary; none of us has ever been tidy, not even those few adopted out.

* * *

"Well," Allyssa said, when the door closed behind the last of the girls the next morning. "Have you come to your senses since yesterday?"

"Have you come to yours?" I coolly---I hoped---poured another cup of coffee and sat down with it. "And aren't those my jeans?"

Allyssa glanced down at her long pinstriped legs. "It's just until I get my laundry done."

"You could have asked," pressing my advantage.

"I didn't think you'd be so stingy." Parry and riposte. *En garde!* mother of Trekkies.

I let my right eyebrow rise slightly, unhampered by cries of *Oh, Mother!* , and sipped at the coffee. Allyssa glanced at me and walked away, down the length of the kitchen, her hands cupped behind her back, head down. Like our mother, like our grandmother. Like every one of us forever, for all I know. Are family gestures genetic? Or something imprinted on the infant brain? I know no way to tell without giving myself away. At the end of the kitchen my sister wheeled on one heel and came back.

"Do you have any idea what you'd be ending?"

"No." I set the cup down carefully, willing it not to chatter against the saucer. "Do you?"

"Gramma had records back to 1512."

"1512 is not 1988."

"Not as easy," Allyssa flashed. "What they went through, those women, our mothers---drowned as witches, put to the stake, condemned as adulterers---"

"And because of their troubles you think my daughters should go on reproducing like---like gussied-up paramecia?"

"Have you no sense of history?"

"Maybe not." I got up, put the cup

in the sink and faced her. "But I do have children. And you don't."

"If mother were here---"

"But she's not."

We both fell quiet. Mother's plane crashed into Boston Harbor, its engines stuffed with birds, just after I started college. Allyssa was a research technician in a hematology lab at the time; the cool blues and purples of the white cells she showed me through her microscope were what first pulled me toward genetics as a profession. That, and my own quandary as to what I am.

"If you don't tell them, I will," Allyssa said.

"Get out of my house."

* * *

She went, of course. I may be poker-faced, but I can be roused. I have the family temper. The family stubbornness. Pigheadedness, Gramma called it.

The family.

We are human, I am absolutely sure. Somehow, some centuries ago, some woman, our ancestor, yearned so strongly for a child that she learned to have one by herself. Perhaps she was isolated, alone, and too poor or proud to be married. Perhaps her husband preferred another. Perhaps she had access to some powerful form of self-shaping other humans have forgotten. I don't know. All I know is that her daughter was slender and agile, had neat round ears, eyebrows that swept upward at the outer end, eyes of a clear greenish brown and hair that was glossy and dark. The girl would have tanned easily, if she'd exposed herself to the sun, and had a small straight nose and a wide mouth whose lower lip quirked inward as she smiled.

Here is my evidence: I have O positive blood (the rhesus antigen for which I am positive is D). I lack no other human blood factors. Put a drop of my blood between two coverslips and pull, stain the dried smear with Wright's, and under the microscope you will see biconcave red cells, polymorpholeucocytes in their infinite variety, the dull blue stodginess of monocytes, lymphocytes with sky-clear cytoplasm. Hemoglobin prepared from what flows in my veins travels with normal hemoglobin A when electrophoresed. Doctors who order other biochemical assays for routine physicals have never found an abnormal value. My electrocardiogram is normal. The one chest X-ray I had before they went out of style showed ribs, lungs, the dome of the diaphragm and liver and spleen nestled beneath it. I nursed my babies, six months each. Nothing, other than a chromosome study, would show me to be what I am. Then, the long line of women so alike---we *must* be derived from human beings. What else could we be?

* * *

A month gone since those meanderings. Allyssa has sent me a copy of our grandmother's records. Just as I suspected, every third or fourth generation, the sad little note: someone got married, had a son, had a daughter that more resembled first one parent and then the other, in the ordinary way.

* * *

It has been nearly four months since I wrote those words. I am so furious, I can barely hold my pen.

Allyssa has made good her threat. How could she think she knows my daughters better than I do myself? Has she forgotten how stubborn we can be, the risks we sometimes take? How often we demand *proof*, the *proof* that things are as someone has stated them to be? She must be insane!

The upshot of it is that Tammie is pregnant. Her grades have fallen this semester; she's been spending her time in meditation. I have demanded that she abort. She refuses. She says, quite coolly, that the school has made provisions for girls who get pregnant and that she can continue to attend. She is due at the end of July; she will have the rest of the summer to make arrangements for someone to keep the baby while she is in school. Her devoted aunt calls me, crestfallen and apologetic, and what the hell good is that supposed to do? The other two are all agog: I suspect that Julie, at the age, God help us, of *fourteen* is also plotting reproduction. I have talked myself blue about the problems of teenage pregnancies---the greater probability of birth defects, the effects upon the mother's education and career, to say nothing of her health---

And to top it off comes the school social worker with a sticky frosted pink smile and "If you could please just try to persuade Tamara to tell us the name of the father, we feel the boys need counselling too. . ." She was lucky to get out of my house alive, although she probably doesn't realize it. *What*, dear Allyssa, am I to do?

* * *

What could I do but continue to work? Go to the lab every day for the past four months, play with my frogs, unravel their dumb DNA. Parthenogenesis has been known to occur in frogs. A clue. Hah!

And meanwhile, attempt to educate my child. I can't imagine what the schools in this country are coming to. Just before New Years, during school vacation, Tammie came dreamily downstairs one morning and said, "I can't wait to see my son."

"Tammie." I pulled out the chair at her place. "Sit down."

She sat, with a sweet patient smile.

"You will have a daughter."

"No."

"Daughter. Girl. Female-type person."

"No."

"Look," I sighed. "In normal human beings, the sex of the child is determined by the father. He contributes either an X or a Y chromosome---X for female, Y for male---and , one single gene on the Y chromosome, not anything that comes from the mother, is what decides whether the baby is a boy or a girl."

"I know that," Tammie replied, still sweet, still patient. "I learned that years ago, Mother." She got up and pulled the Cheerios out of the cupboard.

"We have only X chromosomes," I said. "So we can only have girls. It's always that way, throughout the animal kingdom. When parthenogenesis occurs, the children are always daughters."

"Are you going to tell me about aphids *again*? I'm not an aphid."

"Look," I said. Tammie poured Cheerios into a bowl, added 2% milk and put the bottle back into the refrigerator, sprinkled half the brown sugar she'd normally use onto the cereal.

"Mom," she said. "The trouble with you is that you have no

Counterexample

imagination."

"Darling," I said---sometimes I can't help sarcasm---"I do have history!"

"History is what's done with." Tammie tilted her chair onto its hind legs and leaned back to open the silverware drawer for the forgotten spoon. "My son isn't history. Not yet."

"Don't do that. You'll wreck the chair," was what came out of my mouth. Tammie let it thump back down with a grin, and started to eat. Over the next few weeks I tried everything I could think of to shake her conviction. I brought books home from my office---"Mother, that's human biology," Tammie protested.

"*We* are human."

"How could we be?"

"How could we not?"

She smiled, so sweet, so patient I could have smacked her. I marshalled my evidence. My child---who is at least as intelligent as any of the rest of us---refused to be swayed. I discoursed upon the nature of inquiry. Upon inductive reasoning in general. I even took her into the lab and showed her my frogs, squatting droopily in their tanks, waiting for someone to toss a crumb of hamburger into the air for them.

Tammie enjoyed feeding the frogs.

Spring came. My daughter rounded out, first a thickening of her waist, then a gentle mounding below her navel, pressing ever higher. She studied dutifully, daydreamed about her "son," watched Star Trek with her sisters. Back around Valentine's Day she began signing her name *T'Ami*, Vulcan-style. Some of my fears were allayed: Julie remained her usual active self. She couldn't possibly have had time for the requisite meditation.

* * *

July 12---Tammie's water broke yesterday morning, two week early. She said nothing about it. Therefore no one called the doctor. In the early stages of labor she was able to conceal the contractions long enough to camp in front of the TV for Star Trek re-runs; once hard labor set in, she locked herself in her room. Only when the baby was nearly crowning did she drag herself off her bed and let me into the room to help.

I wish I hadn't. I wish I had sent her far away to have this baby, where no one we know. . .no. No. No, I don't.

My life, the whole structure of what I am, has fallen apart. The child, thank Heaven, lived only a minute or two. Why, I'm not sure. He seemed perfectly formed, from his tiny toenails to the tips of his pointed ears. The placenta was a sappy green; it smelled like sweet corn just torn from its stalk, the tang of crushed grass with a musty undertone. "Copper instead of iron in the hemoglobin," Tammie informed me smugly. "Type T negative," whatever that may be. Well, why not? If a plant can put magnesium where iron should be and get a type of chlorophyll, if a horseshoe crab can similarly use copper and come up with the blue blood of a nobleman. . .oh, Tammie! Is that it? Did you get the valence of the copper wrong?

Tammie also told me her son's heart would be where one would expect the liver; she was quite correct. About the other internal organs, she wasn't sure. They were rather a mishmash, but I saw no obvious reason why they shouldn't have worked. Everything connected.

Later, once she's rested, I'll try to get her to tell me how she did it. How she arranged the chromosomes she came with to construct this semi-Vulcan child born of a popular fiction and a---a what? Later, we will make a plan. How to conceal this birth, how to divert suspicion. Tammie can't help with that, not yet. Just now, she is upstairs, weeping.

And I? All this time, these years, I've thought that somehow I was human, like all of you around me. That if I wanted, any time I wanted, I could slip into the great stream of human history and take my place, like any woman with forty-six chromosomes in all but a few hundred of her cells. My own "normality," the long unimaginative line of women exactly like myself, the occasional fertile marriages among them, seemed proof enough. That's the trouble with a scientific hypothesis, I tell myself bitterly. It is always vulnerable to the counterexample.

What am I? Where could I have come from, those generations ago? And why?

Women have had children alone since recorded time began. How many others, with other builds and other features, are like me? Do they know? They must!

Sisters, please, show me your faces! Soon!

❧ *L.A. Taylor*

CONTRIBUTORS

Mary C. Aldridge was born in California and attended the Clarion Workshop; however she has lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts since 1968. She has been published in several semi-pro magazines, and is also interested in fantasy writing, in good Regency novels -- sounds to me like a contradiction in terms -- and in mysteries. She is also, as one might guess from this story, interested in African culture and art, and we'd say she handles it pretty well.

Alicia Austin has been an artist for a considerable time -- for anyone so young. In my opinion, her greatest accomplishment was to illustrate all of the Jirel of Joiry stories of C.L. Moore -- and she's still working. She also produced some ribald -- and very funny -- pictures of Centaurs, which I (one of the last Victorians) found embarrassing -- but don't let that stop you from seeing them if you are lucky enough. You can see her work at any convention art show.

George Barr got his first major break selling two covers to "Fantastic Stories" circa 1960. He has been active in the field ever since, garnering 7 or 8 Hugo nominations for his illustrations. You can also see his current works in "Amazing Stories" and many Dungeon and Dragon publications.

Armand Cabrera A rising young astronomical artist known mostly for his color work. Here he shows his versatility with black and white fantasy illustrations.

Pat Cirone is making her third sale with "A Flower from the Dust of Khedderide " (originally entitled "To Father a Sohn") she has also appeard in the anthologies *Sword and Sorceress* and *Yankee Witches.*

M. Coleman Easton has written two novels -- *Masters of Glass* and *The Fisherman's Curse* -- about the world of Vigens and magic glass. His desert tale, Iskiir, was ranked by several critics among the best fantasy novels of 1986. His latest work is *Spirits of Cavern and Hearth* (St. Martin, 1988). He spends a good deal of his time traveling and picking up backgrounds for his stories. I heard him speak recently at a school library program for young people. Born in New York State, Easton now lives in San Jose, California.

Janet Fox is a well-known writer of fantasy stories, and spends time between the various anthologies where her work has appeared--too numerous to mention, but if you read much fantasy you've seen them. She lives in Kansas, and between tornadoes, edits a magazine for writers in small presses.

Our Cover illustration is the work of **Frank Kelly Freas,** perhaps the most honored and respected artist in the Science Fictions field. His career spans more than three decades, from the Golden Age pulps.We are proud to have our publication among the countless publications which have featured his work.

Things that go bump in the mailbox: *"Falling Apart"* struck me as so funny that I simply rolled on the floor while reading it. So much for people who say I have no sense of humour. **Larry Hodges** has been writing since 1988 (long career, that) -- and we quickly add that we hope it continues. He has a degree in math (that and a token will get him a ride on the subway) -- and has anyone ever figured out why so many mathematicians are humorists? Think of Lewis Carroll.

Phyllis Ann Karr's novels include the widely praised *Frostflower and Thorn* and *Frostflower and Windbourne.* She had the distinction of contributing the lead story to the very first volume of *Sword and Sorceress.* She has also written an Arthurian novel as well as mystery stories. Among her recent works is the fantasy novel *At Amberleaf Fair.* She is a resident of Wisconsin.

Deborah Millitello is a native of Southern Illinois and has been reading science fiction and fantasy since fourth grade and writing it too. Her non-fiction interests include growing herbs, herbal medicines, genetic engineering, archaeology and planetary ecology. I'd be a little afraid to investigate her pantry shelves, though...

L.A. Taylor began writing at eleven by "pelting John W. Campbell with half-formed stories," but (I hesitate to suggest a connection) most of her writing has appeared in other fields. She has published much poetry and several mystery novels. She also keeps house ("more or less"), gardens, and sings classical music. She adds that she is married and has two daughters, both diploid; when you read her story, you'll understand the qualification.

Mary Frances Zambreno has sold stories to the Darkover anthology *Sword of Chaos,* to *Sword and Sorceress* (volumes 3 and 5), and most recently to Jane Yolen's anthology *Things That Go Bump in the Night.* She holds a PhD in Medieval Languages and Literature and is currently the fantasy review columnist for "American Fantasy Magazine."

the CAULDRON

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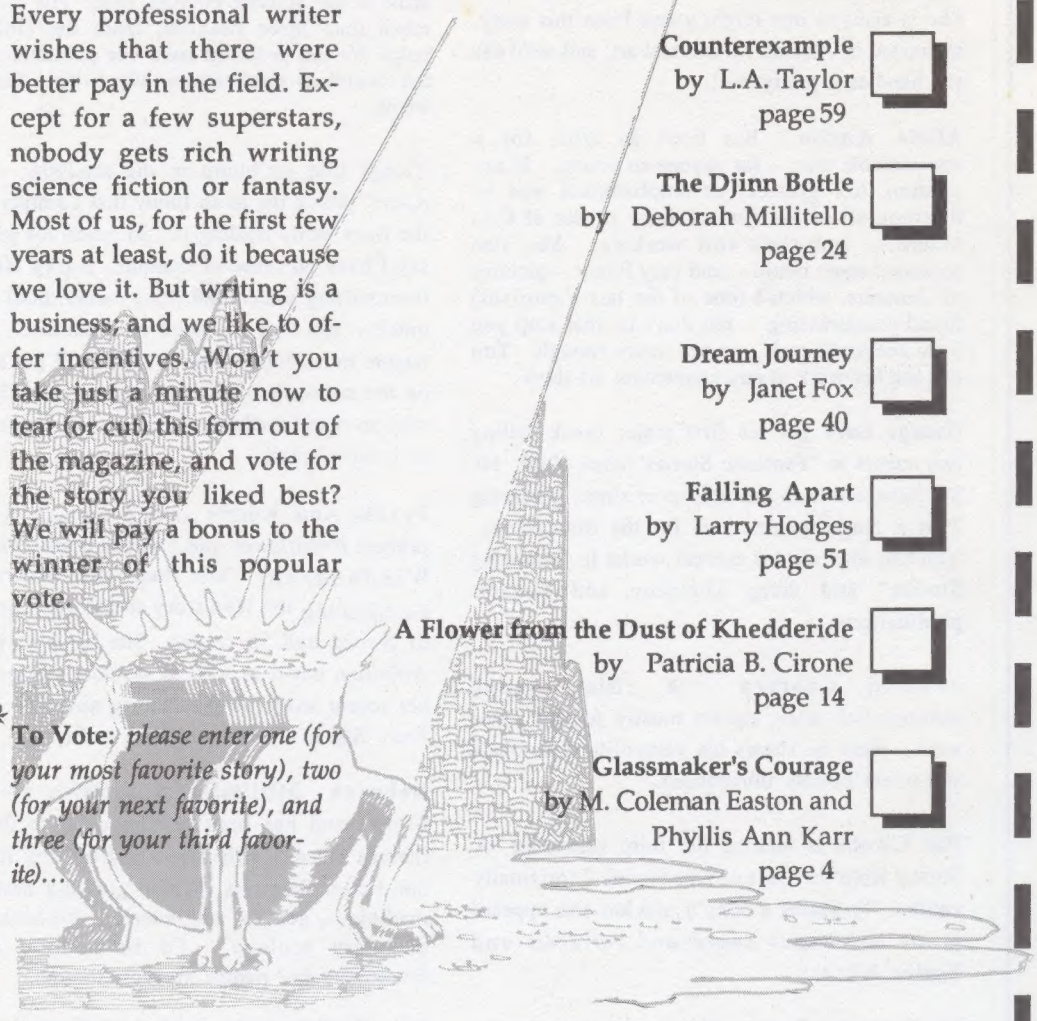

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- **Counterexample** by L.A. Taylor page 59 ☐
- **The Djinn Bottle** by Deborah Millitello page 24 ☐
- **Dream Journey** by Janet Fox page 40 ☐
- **Falling Apart** by Larry Hodges page 51 ☐
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- **Glassmaker's Courage** by M. Coleman Easton and Phyllis Ann Karr page 4 ☐

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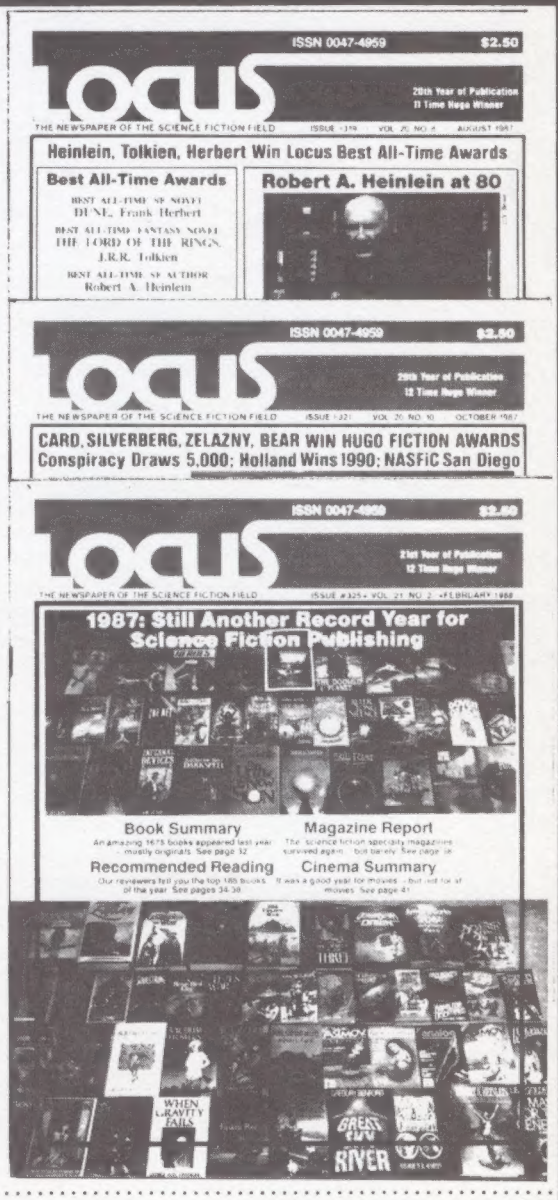
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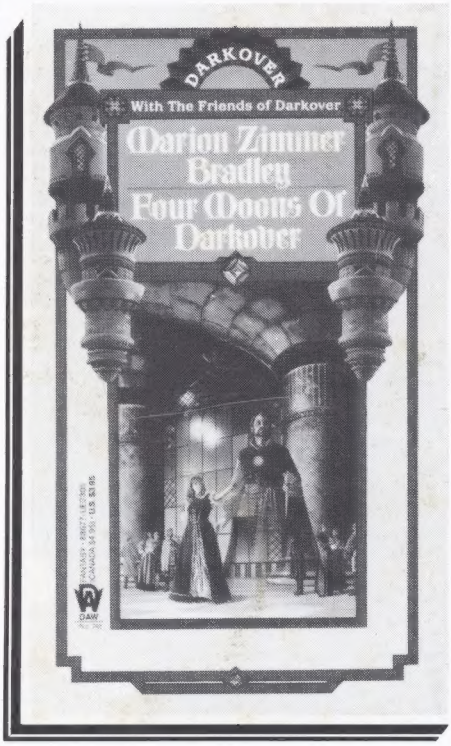

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